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BY FORTUNÉ DU BOISGOBEY.

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WHERE'S ZENOBIA?

I. I

THE night was clear and the sky starry. The height of Montmartre stood out against the horizon, which was reddened by the last rays of the setting sun, and cast a deep shadow upon the spot now known as the Place Saint-Pierre. Although it was not yet nine o'clock, the noise of Parisian street traffic was no longer heard. The dull booming of distant cannon alone troubled the profound calmness of the summer eve. The great city seemed to be asleep, and the usually turbulent neighbourhood of the Barrière Rochechouart was as still and as silent as the deserts of Arabia Petrea.

It is true that at that time Montmartre was beyond the city walls, and there were more windmills than houses there. It is now one of the most crowded and busy districts of the capital of France; but in 1815 it was only a suburb with few inhabitants, and even these were of ill-repute. Taverns, however, abounded there, and on Sundays, in fine weather especially, the neighbourhood was often enlivened till very late by the bellowing of belated drunkards and the laughter of merry roisterers returning home after dining at some wine-shop.

On the evening in question—it was the 2nd of July, 1815, a Sunday, and the weather was very fine—the Parisians, who are so fond of exercise and excursions into the country, must have had serious reasons for shutting themselves up at so early an hour. And, in fact, if they thus refrained from roaming about the far from flowery Plaine des Vertus and sitting at the tables of the eating-houses, it was owing to the presence of the enemy at their gates—for the second time within two years. The remains of the French army, almost annihilated at Waterloo, had been driven under the walls of Paris. The English occupied Saint-Ouen, the Prussians were at Gennevilliers, and the cannon, heard at intervals, were those of the batteries of Général Vandamme, who was still fighting, with a handful of men, in the Plaine de Montrouge.

Being patriotic above everything, the working-classes felt the humiliation of defeat very deeply. It is not surprising, therefore, that they were but little inclined to carouse amid the general mourning, and that they had for the time being deserted the haunts where they had been wont to amuse themselves.

Still, even in this lonely corner of the city, invested by triumphant enemies, the solitude was not complete. Two men, motionless and mute, were crouching at the foot of the height, and so close to it that they seemed to form part of it.

The sandy formation, which forms the southern side of the height, did not then look as it now does. On that side the hill was much steeper, and numbered several huge quarries. The mass of plaster with which modern Montmartre was afterwards built was then being excavated, and the flanks of the then unpeopled hill were fearlessly dug into. When it was covered with habitations at a later date, the doors of the subterranean galleries were closed, without the voids being filled up; so that twenty crowded streets now stand over deep caverns, and are, so to speak, suspended in the air, like the Babylonian Gardens of Semiramis.

In 1815 these caverns, which had been dug out by five or six generations of toilers, extended in every direction in the form of galleries, and even reached to the very heart of the hill. During the previous twenty years there had been but little digging, as Paris under the Republic and the Empire had been busy with other matters; but after the peace of 1814 the building craze had revived, and the workmen had returned to the quarries. However, they only worked a small portion of them, and the one which extended under the slope, towards the Chaussée de Clignancourt, was still quite deserted. This part of the old excavations had been even walled up, to avert the danger of falling in, and to prevent the boys of the neighbourhood from venturing inside; so that the oldest inhabitants of these distant regions alone remembered having entered this quarry as children. It was said that it served as a refuge for malefactors "wanted" by the police, and that some dishonest workmen hid stolen plaster there; but no one inquired into these matters, and the existence of these catacombs had gradually become a mere popular belief. Sensible people refused to admit that the height of Montmartre concealed within itself such corridors and chambers as are found in the Egyptian pyramids. The incredulous would probably have changed their minds had they seen the two men who were crouching among the thistles and briars which then grew abundantly upon the dry soil of the Mount of Martyrs. It would have been difficult to mistake them for plaster diggers, for their clothes were dark, but there was nothing to prove that they might not be some of the barrier roughs, and were lurking there for some bad purpose; and this supposition was all the more plausible as one of them emerged from his hiding-place at times, looked attentively about him, and then returned to his nook. They were evidently on the watch for some one, or possibly they were spying on behalf of a band of rascals hiding in the quarry.

Whatever their intentions might be, these two prowlers were badly matched, at least as far as could be seen. One was tall and slender, the other bulky and short. One was well made, and had

the quick movements of a young man, the other had the heavy build and the slow movements of an old one. The first popped out from time to time to peer about him, while his companion kept back in the nook where they had ensconced themselves. This fissure, made by the rain, seemed to grow narrower as it receded, but it was so sinuous that a passer-by could not have told its extent. The stouter of the pair of watchers seemed to block up the passage, and, indeed, if it led to a cave, this broad-shouldered man was quite broad enough to hide it.

"Brother, don't you see any one coming?" he asked, in a mild voice, of his companion, who was now on the look-out for the tenth time, at least.

"No, nobody," replied the scout, curtly.

"You might have answered, like Sister Anne in 'Blue Beard,' 'I only see the green grass and the grey dust,'" resumed the other in a jesting tone.

"I am not in the humour for joking."

"Why not? Because the Prussians will be inside Paris to-morrow? I have been expecting them here for the last two weeks, my poor Lucien, and I have made up my mind to put up with them."

"You are very fortunate; but I cannot reconcile myself so easily to my country's misfortunes."

"I see! You're vexed because you did not get killed at Waterloo. I can understand that, but what would you have? A man cannot serve Mars and Venus at the same time, and take his soldiers to the field while he is making love. You must choose; you must either fight against Blucher and Wellington, or else win the hand of the divine Thérèse."

"Enough of that, Machefer!" interrupted the young man. "I have already told you that I do not like to be teased on that subject. You must also know that if I have not returned to my former regiment, it is only because my wound is not yet healed, and I am not fit to fight."

"There! there! don't get angry!" said the individual who answered to the strange name of Machefer. "No one doubts your courage, and I less than any one. Besides, it is certain that you couldn't leave on the 25th, as the Grand Master had ordered you to remain in Paris to attend to your wall."

"If my cursed leg had been strong enough to carry me to Belgium I shouldn't have remained behind on account of any order."

"Take care, Lucien! The Grand Master is not far off, and if a Freemason happened to hear you——"

"Let him! what do I care? Since I have belonged to the society, I have rendered enough services to have a right to speak out."

"That is true, you have not spared yourself, nor have I, but we must go on to the end. This is, perhaps, our last meeting, for to-morrow the Bourbon government will be re-established by our friends

'the enemies,' and we shall be tracked after a fine fashion. The Grand Master is prudent, and will probably disband us for awhile."

"He ought to have done so before. If he had not sent for me to-night, I should have been able to do some work in the woods of Verrières. Yesterday, at Vélizy, Exelmans routed the Prussians, and I am sure that I should have found a chance to wing two or three of them myself."

"Bah! what are two or three Germans more or less? You are doing better work here."

"I don't see that I am; but, as you are so well informed, pray tell me why we were told to come here."

"You have no idea, then?"

"None whatever. I was told to be at the *building* at a quarter to nine to-night. That's all I know about it."

"Well, then, there is a traitor to be punished."

"Ah! and so that is why the Grand Master sent us to watch here and went in there, at least so you tell me, and is now sitting upon a big stone, together with four knights of the trowel?"

"Exactly; they are his assessors, and the big stone is the bench of his criminal court."

"This parody upon the law does not suit me at all," muttered Lucien.

"Parody is not the word," replied Machefer. "You will presently see that nothing can be more serious. But your surprise amazes me. Have you never been present at a sitting of the court?"

"Never. I have only been a mason for a year."

"Then you will have the pleasure of a surprise. It is something to see, I assure you."

The young man shrugged his shoulders disdainfully, and replied: "I am not curious, and I maintain that we might have chosen a better time for meeting than when the country is in throes of agony."

"My dear Lucien, you talk very foolishly. Can't you see that this is the best of all times for settling such a little family difficulty? The Parisians have retreated into their houses like rabbits into their holes, and the police are all topsy-turvy, for the cannon is at work on the Plaine de Montrouge. So no one will come here to disturb us, and the proof of it is that we have not yet seen a single passer-by."

"Shall we have to remain here much longer on the watch?"

"I don't think so; for, if I am not mistaken, the man must have been arrested not far from here."

"How will he be brought here?"

"As usual. In a sack."

"In a sack? Are you crazy?"

"Not at all. In such a case as this that is our custom. But you will soon see for yourself, for I think that I hear some footsteps, and I'll wager that our friends are near."

"However," began Lucien, "I declare that——"

"Be still! Here they are!" interrupted Machefer, clutching hold of his arm.

Lucien said no more, for he was not sure whether it was a passer-by or some masons coming up, and he feared to betray the secret of the entrance to the *building*. Machefer was not mistaken. Footsteps as regular as those of marching troops were soon heard, and two men presently emerged, side by side, from a road between two walls, running by at twenty paces on the left. Another followed with a bundle on his back, and then came another who was unencumbered.

The first two stopped when they were near the hiding-place, and tapped three times with the cudgels which they held in their hands. Machefer replied to this signal by whistling in a peculiar manner, and then the party quickly came up.

"It is they," muttered the fat mason. "You see that they have not made us wait."

His young companion did not reply. He was staring at the newcomers, and seemed ill-pleased to find that he had not been misinformed as to the manner in which his associates conveyed such persons as they were ordered to arrest. The sack was there, as Machefer had asserted, and contained a living man; it was borne, too, by a stout fellow, whose broad shoulders did not even bend under this strange burden.

Lucien could not recover from his astonishment, and it is probable that he more than ever regretted that he had not gone that evening to fire on the Prussians in the woods of Verrières; however, the moment was not a good one for protesting against the tactics initiated by the leader of the association. Thus he kept quiet and allowed his companion, who was used to such matters, to talk with the two scouts.

"It is settled, it seems," said Machefer, rubbing his hands.

"Quite settled, old man," replied one of the men, who had a rough voice and a soldierly air, "the cat is bagged."

"So it is," laughed the facetious Machefer. And he added, standing aside: "Come in, my children. They are waiting for you inside. Lucien and I will bring up the rear."

Lucien did not protest against this suggestion. He also stood aside, and the two men passed by, gliding into the recess which had served to hide the masons, and disappeared.

The man with the sack followed, and then came the man behind him. The sack brushed against Lucien, who felt a body stir under the canvas.

He could no longer doubt the truth—a living being was stifling in that sack. Apparently, however, the prisoner was resigned to his fate, for he did not utter a cry. He stirred, but did not even sigh.

Lucien felt greatly overcome, and followed the other masons reluctantly.

"Come, Lucien, let us make haste inside," said Machefer to him

in a low tone. "The Grand Master must be anxious to finish his task."

Lucien hesitated. He undoubtedly foresaw a tragic scene, and shrunk from beholding it. However, his comrade urged him along, and he finally consented to proceed.

The path that the others had taken lay before him, and although it was not an easy one, he had no difficulty in following it. Difficulty of progress only existed at the entrance, in point of fact. The spot where the two friends had stationed themselves had the appearance of being a mere crevice made by rain and drought, and a passer-by could not see that it extended into the heart of the hill. However, it turned off suddenly to the left, between two tufts of thistles, and behind a huge stone there came a gallery which it was easy to enter by slightly stooping. Boys at play near by might have discovered it without any trouble. But had they ventured inside, despite the uninviting appearance of the opening, they would have been repelled at once by the darkness and terrified by the swarms of bats which infested the ugly cavern.

And it would have been necessary to know whither the gallery led before venturing upon an expedition which seemed like a descent into Hades itself. But to those who knew it, and who had the courage to proceed some ten paces from the opening, the road soon seemed easy. After a few turns the gallery became broader and higher, and it was then possible to walk on and breathe easily. There was no danger of going astray, for there were no side-paths. It sufficed to touch one of the walls and follow it to reach the end.

Lucien had no difficulty in doing so. The sound of his comrades' footsteps ahead would have sufficed to guide him, but he did not need this additional help, for Machefer was in the rear. So he went groping along, with his friend at his heels, and all impatience to know how this unexpected adventure would end.

When he had received the orders of the leaders of the secret society to which he belonged, he had expected to be present at a sitting at which some serious resolutions would be adopted, for a change was about to take place in the government—a change which directly threatened the Freemasons. He had not foreseen that he would be forced to behold a tragic sight. He did not feel any fear or lack of strength, such as makes a terrible spectacle repulsive. He had seen many trying sights; but, although resolute and used to such scenes, the unknown appalled him. Or rather, it did not terrify him as much as it disturbed him.

After walking on for five minutes in the darkness, he began to see a little.

The gallery was lighted up by a still distant glow. Gleams trembled above the humid vault, and made the drops of water which ran along the wall sparkle like diamonds.

"Here we are," muttered Machefer; "and it seems to me that the sitting must have begun, as the place is fully illuminated."

And, indeed, the lights increased in brightness, and soon the young man, on turning a corner in the gallery, was so dazzled that he stopped abruptly. His eyes, still dim with the darkness, could scarcely endure the brilliancy of a dozen torches, held by as many masons, who were standing in a circle at a few steps from the spot where the gallery ended in an immense subterranean hall.

This hall, as may be guessed, was but an old deserted quarry, left thus for years, or perhaps for centuries. Its high vaults, sustained by innumerable pillars, were lost to sight in the darkness above, and it seemed to extend far away under the hill upon which modern Montmartre is built.

These pillars had not been raised by the masons with an architect's help. While excavating, the workmen had naturally left massive columns at certain distances, in order to prevent the soil from giving way above; and, as they progressed, more and more of these supports had constantly been needed. There were hundreds of them, and the eyes were bewildered by this forest of seeming towers with white walls which stood out against the dark depths of the cavern.

"Let us make haste; we are late," said Machefer, pushing his companion forward.

The brethren carrying the sack were, in fact, already in the luminous circle. Recovering from his surprise, Lucien hastened on, and soon reached the spot where the council had assembled.

He glided in between two of the torch-bearers, while Machefer went on still further. The four men had laid their burden upon the ground, and had joined the circle with the rest. A stranger sight can scarcely be imagined than that presented by all these men gathered around a canvas bag with a human form within it. The darkness was dense above their heads. The outlines of the Freemasons stood out like black phantoms against the columns lit up by the flickering torches. Amid the shadows about them the frightened owls were fluttering. It really seemed like a witches' Sabbath.

Those present, however, had nothing diabolical about their appearance. They were dressed in the fashion of the day, almost all of them having military-cut coats, and looking more like soldiers in citizens' attire than like wizards. They were of all ages and styles of countenance—there were rough faces, with grey whiskers, side by side with youthful, beardless ones. One man alone was distinguishable from the others by the elevated position which he occupied on a huge stone, and by the white hood which covered his head, as well as the long black gown about his figure. All that could be seen of his face was his eyes, which glittered like living fire from behind a silken mask.

Two acolytes stood on his left, and two on his right. These four men were not masked, but each held a huge trowel, undoubtedly the insignia of office.

The president of this weird assembly, the man in the gown, could be no other than the Grand Master, as Machefer called him. He soon showed that such was the case. "Brethren," said he, in a clear, sonorous voice, "I have called you together to help me to punish a traitor."

No one replied; but a few approving murmurs were heard, while Machefer nudged Lucien, and whispered: "It seems that I guessed rightly."

As for Lucien, he said nothing. He was too much agitated to reply.

"Brethren," resumed the Grand Master, "what is the punishment which a traitor deserves?"

"Death!" exclaimed the masons.

"But what death?" demanded the president.

"Walling up!" replied ten voices, with which Lucien's did not mingle.

"Your sentence shall be executed," replied the masked man. "The traitor shall be walled up. Brethren of the trowel, prepare!"

The four acolytes provided with trowels now went towards the sack, which lay in the centre of the circle.

The Grand Master stopped them with a gesture.

"Before punishing the scamp," said he, raising his voice, "I must question the brethren who arrested him. Come forward, Cyrillo."

The man thus designated left the circle. Lucien recognised him as the individual who had spoken to Machefer at the moment when the party approached them; he was a stout fellow, with that sort of face which one would scarcely care to meet in a lonely spot.

"Tell us what happened," said the masked man.

"I will, in a few words," replied Cyrillo. "I took the three brethren belonging to my wall to that small house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt that bears the number 13. We did not meet any one, and there was no one near the house itself. I had a key to the gate. I opened it quietly, and we went in. The shutters were closed on the side facing the street, but on turning towards the garden we saw a light on the ground floor. Then we crept up, and through the window panes we caught sight of the man."

"What was he doing?"

"He was sitting at a table and writing. We could not see his face, because his back was turned towards us; but I recognised him all the same from your description."

"Small, slight, with narrow shoulders, and black hair?"

"Yes. His dress also was as you said—a travelling-coat with a high cape, top-boots, and a hat with a wide brim."

"Good! Then you broke open the door?"

"No need of that, master. It was half ajar, and all we had to do was to push it open. Vannier held the sack, Brulart had the fetters, and I had the gag. Lognon stayed behind to keep a look-

out. I went in first, and when the individual turned round I went up to him and muzzled him in less than no time. Brulart put on the handcuffs. Vannier threw the sack over his head, and he was inside it before he knew what was happening. That was a neat job, or I'm greatly mistaken."

"Didn't he speak?"

"Not a word. Brulart took him upon his back like a meal sack, and here he is."

"Is that all?"

"Yes. Ah! I forgot to tell you that I upset the lamp when I ran up to him, so that he did not see our faces any more than we saw his. But when he was in the sack I struck a light, and I took what was lying on the table—two pistols and the paper on which he had been writing."

"Give those things to me," said the Grand Master, curtly.

Brother Cyrille put his hand under his long overcoat, and brought forth the objects he had been asked for. The president took up the pistols and hid them under his gown, then cast his eyes upon the paper, and shook his head with the air of a judge to whom an incriminating item of proof has been delivered.

"His identity is clearly shown," said he, tapping upon the document. "This is a letter which the scoundrel was writing to denounce us, at the moment when our brethren seized him. He had not time to complete it, but it begins with these words, which speak for themselves—'My lord, permit me to tell your excellency—' That is all; but it shows that it was addressed to the head of the police."

A thrill of indignation sped through the assembly, and Lucien thought the sack stirred a little. The prisoner, whom the gag prevented from speaking, undoubtedly understood that the proof was a crushing one, and that his fate was decided.

"Now, brethren," said the man with the hood, "we have only to execute the unanimous sentence which you have pronounced; but before doing justice, I have a general order to give you, for this meeting is the last that we shall hold here. Paris has been given up by the cowards who undertook to defend it. To-morrow the enemy will occupy the heights of Montmartre, which now shelter us, and persecution will begin; for we have been pointed out to our enemies by a traitor. Thus the time has come for dispersing, since we are no longer strong enough for open resistance; but I hope that none of us will ever deny the cause we serve—"

"No, no; never!" cried all present.

"Let each man watch and work in the shade until I again call upon you to take part in the work of deliverance. I hope that it is not far off; but, while we await it, do not despair or remain inactive. Remember your motto: 'Death to the oppressors of our country!' and strike fearlessly and without remorse. Every foreigner, and every upholder of the foreigners, must be exterminated by fire and

sword. If each Frenchman killed one of our enemies, or one of those who befriend them, the people would soon be free and the country avenged. Do not forget, but act. We are not more than a handful as yet, but in a year we shall be ten thousand, and in two years we shall be a hundred thousand. Think of all the harm which we have already done to the invaders and their allies, and persevere in your task."

A great shout greeted this energetic exhortation.

"Swear, one and all," resumed the Master, in a loud voice, "to strike at them pitilessly!"

"In a duel, as I did ten times last year, I swear to do so," said Lucien; "but I will not be an assassin!"

The hands which had been raised in acceptance of the frightful oath demanded fell at once, and all eyes were turned upon the daring individual who presumed to demur. "Brother," said the masked man, fixing his glittering eyes upon the person who thus objected, "all means are allowable to those who fight for France."

"For France! My sword is hers, but I refuse to serve her with the dagger!" replied Lucien, boldly.

"So be it; I accept your sword," resumed the Grand Master, with a calmness which greatly surprised the masons present. "You have made too good use of it for me to wish to force you to use any other weapons. But all our friends are not like you, and I rely upon finding them less scrupulous."

"So be it. We swear—all of us!" exclaimed the brethren, excited by the president's speech.

"It is well, brothers!" rejoined the imperturbable president of the strange meeting. "Trust in me, as I trust in you, and await my orders. But, before we separate, I must punish the man who has betrayed us. Companions of the trowel, seize upon the condemned man and wall him up!"

The four men around the Grand Master advanced, seized hold of the sack, and carried it away.

Lucien saw them go toward a pillar, in which a cavity large enough to contain the body of a man had already been made. Before he could recover from his amazement, the sack was already placed in this cavity, and the companions, taking up their trowels again, hastily began to wall up the unfortunate prisoner in this frightful sepulchre. Thereupon Lucien rushed furiously towards the executioners, but the man with the cowl made a gesture, and two vigorous brethren threw themselves upon him, and it was in vain that he endeavoured to free himself.

"Be quiet," whispered Machefer; "be quiet, my dear friend, if you don't wish to get yourself into trouble."

"Be quiet!" exclaimed Lucien. "You tell me to be quiet, when I see an abominable crime committed?"

"A crime, brother?" said the masked man in a grave voice. "You are in error; what is about to be done in obedience to my

orders is just, and there is no criminal here excepting the wretch who is now about to die."

"No; it is horrible! it is infamous! You shall kill me sooner than make me your accomplice!"

"Child, do you know what this man did—this man whose part you are taking?" asked the Grand Master, calmly. "Listen. He knew all our secrets, and sold them for money. We were all about to be arrested, when, three months ago, the downfall of the government which had secured his vile services saved us from the galleys and the scaffold. He had time to fly to foreign parts to escape our vengeance, but he returned here with our enemies, whom he served. I was informed of his return yesterday, and at the same time I learned that he had given up the Pecq bridge to the Prussians. If I had allowed him to live we should all have been lost. But the hour for punishment had come. I knew the place where he had taken refuge while waiting for Paris to surrender to Blucher and Wellington. I gave orders to the brethren to seize him; and this letter which I now hold must show you that it was time to finish with him, for he was writing to denounce us. And now, Brother Lucien, will you still undertake to plead this rascal's cause, and will you still ask that he should be pardoned?"

"I demand a trial on his behalf."

"He has been tried and unanimously sentenced."

"You have condemned him without a hearing."

"The tribunal of the Freemasons does not question traitors, it executes them—and this man is the worst of traitors."

"Well, then, execute him, at least, with an uncovered face, if only to reproach him with his own infamy, and force him to admit his guilt; but do not disgrace yourselves by a mode of punishment that would fill even savages with horror. What prevented you from killing him at his own house, as you do not shrink from murder? By what right are you so hideously cruel?"

"By the right given us by the laws which he swore to obey when he became one of us, when he introduced himself among us to send us to the guillotine!" replied the Grand Master, in a voice of thunder. "When we condemn a false brother to death, we wish that he should *disappear* and leave no trace behind him. Our security depends upon this; and each person, on entering the association, swears to submit to this terrible but salutary rule. You would know all, this had you been longer among us; and you would also know that this is not the first traitor whom we have thus punished. Look at those pillars, brother," continued the masked man, pointing with the hand which still held the letter to the numerous supports of the vaults, "look, and count the places where the moss has not yet had time to grow—"

"And so," exclaimed Lucien, "you boast of having already committed other atrocious misdeeds, and in the pillars that support this cavern—"

"Men are buried who were justly sentenced ; and he who is now about to disappear behind the mortar is even more guilty than they were. You now know why I am called the Grand Master. Do not forget it."

Lucien made a violent effort to free himself from the two brethren who held him, and to spring upon the pitiless executioners, who were so actively plying their trowels that they had already half walled up the cavity ; but he did not succeed, and could only shout : "You are assassins and cowards !"

"Take him away !" said the Grand Master, in an imperious voice.

In the twinkling of an eye Lucien was raised up by eight strong arms, and dragged towards the entrance of the vault. He vainly struggled to free himself, but he was borne along to the gallery and left there. As soon as his feet touched the ground, and he turned around to throw himself upon those who were thus ejecting him, all the torches went out, and he found himself in utter darkness.

He uttered a cry of rage, and stretched out his arms to seize upon the executors of the Grand Master's orders, but he found nothing. The brethren had vanished like ghosts.

He then started to run after them, but he had scarcely taken a step towards the central cavern when he felt that there was a separation in the gallery wall, for he had reached a point where it opened into the central quarry, and accordingly he paused. As long as he could feel the walls on both sides he had the "thread of Ariadne" in his hand, and indeed it was sufficient to face about and follow the turnings of the gallery to reach the plateau at the foot of the height of Montmartre ; whereas to dash on at haphazard through the vast space within was to expose himself to losing his bearings, and thus rush to certain death. How could he find his way in an immense labyrinth in the midst of profound darkness ? And, if chance led him to the place where the comrades still lurked who had so brutally expelled him, was it not beyond a doubt that they, so unscrupulous as regards means of repression, would deal cruelly with him ?

He fortunately thought of all this while there was still time to do so. A step further, and he would perhaps have been irretrievably lost. However, he gradually recovered his self-possession, and instead of going on he began to listen attentively.

He did not hear the least noise. Nothing stirred in the darkness which his eyes vainly endeavoured to penetrate. It was evident that the companions of the trowel had been forced to suspend their operation, for even admitting that they could work without a light, Lucien, in the complete silence, would certainly have heard the mortar and the trowels. He stood with his neck outstretched, his arms extended, and his hands upon the walls of the gallery, firmly determined not to lose that point of vantage, but not knowing whether he ought to remain or retire.

In spite of himself, he felt drawn towards the depths of the sub-

terranean vault where the executioners were now carrying on their fearful work. He was not greatly interested in the traitor, but he was somewhat of a Don Quixote, and inclined to defend the weak, even though they might be rascals.

At last a new idea occurred to him. He said to himself that the horrible operation must be over, and that he could no longer help the victim. At the moment when the torches had gone out, the abominable walling-up had progressed far enough for the man in the sack to be already suffocated. It was folly, therefore, to remain there any longer; and useless folly, as any attempt to save the scamp would be in vain. And, besides, the Grand Master might order his assistants to seize him and cruelly punish him for daring to rebel against the barbarous customs of the association.

There were pillars in abundance for the purpose of walling-up, and Lucien did not care to sleep till the day of judgment in a block of masonry, like an Egyptian Pharaoh. Moreover, this bold young fellow, who belonged to this dark and mysterious association, was not a conspirator absolutely detached from all things of this world. He had, on the contrary, the best of reasons for desiring to live in it. He remembered in good time that in Paris, where such frightful dramas were enacted, there was an adorable and beloved being who would die of despair if Lieutenant Bellefond should disappear.

For "Brother Lucien" was named Bellefond, and was a lieutenant of infantry; on half pay, it is true, like many of his comrades of the 25th regiment of the line, whom the government of the Restoration had sent home after the arrival of the allies.

It would have been foolish to expose himself to losing his way in that fatal quarry, or to falling into the pitiless hands of the executors of the Grand Master's justice, and so he made up his mind to retire as he had come.

He turned round and began to walk along the gallery, following its turnings. When he got outside he experienced keen satisfaction in breathing freely and again beholding the starry sky.

The night was as calm, the sky as serene as ever, and the esplanade in front of the butte as lonely as before. Not a living creature was to be seen, not a sound was to be heard, for even the distant firing of the cannon had ceased.

He longed to leave the spot, and thus he rapidly traversed the lonely street which led towards the outer walls of the city. Then, as he was worn out with fatigue and excitement, he seated himself upon a pile of wood which had been left there by some dealer in lumber, and rested awhile with his elbows upon his knees, his chin on his hand, and his face turned towards the harmless-looking height which harboured such terrible mysteries.

It seemed to him that he must have been dreaming, and that a nightmare full of fantastic visions had visited him. However, the reality was there before his eyes; for he could not be thus seated at such an hour and in such a lonely spot as this was, with a plank for

a seat, and all without some real cause. Besides, he knew all too well that he belonged to a secret society, and had been a member of it for a whole year, although he had never before been present at any of the meetings thus held from time to time in the bowels of the earth.

He had never served the society except in the broad daylight; but he had served it, and might be called upon to serve it again. This far from attractive prospect soon filled his mind, and he asked himself whether he ought not now to consider himself free from any tie uniting him to the brethren. However, all at once he thought he saw a human form emerge from the shadow cast by the hill over the Clignancourt road. In the frame of mind in which he found himself, all passers-by seemed suspicious and any encounter to be avoided. He therefore quietly rose up to reach the Barrière Rochechouart, but he had not gone three steps before he was hailed by his name of Lucien.

This unexpected call made him stop and wait for the person who was thus hailing him. He even made up his mind to give him a warm reception if he came as an enemy, and picked up a stone for that purpose. But the individual who emerged from the darkness was none other than his stout friend Machefer. The old soul ran as quickly towards him as his short legs and capacious stomach would allow of.

"It is I," said he, puffing away like an engine. "What's the matter?" he added, seeing that the young man had a stone in his hand. "That's a pretty way to greet a friend! Do you mean to knock me down?"

"I do not know whether you are still my friend or not; but I declare that I am no friend of your lord and master, the Grand Master, nor of the rascals whom he employs, nor of the cowards who wink at his crimes," replied Lucien, angrily.

"There, there, what a fuss about a few layers of mortar!" rejoined Machefer, quietly. "Throw away that ugly stone which you were going to pitch at me, and let us talk together. That would be much more sensible than all that you have been saying and doing for the last hour."

"Well, then, let us talk. But I begin by declaring that I don't intend to take any further part whatever in the doings of the abominable association into which you introduced me," exclaimed the young officer, laying down his arms—that is to say, flinging away the stone.

"Good! you will not be summoned again to the meetings, that's settled. But I hope you will continue to send the Prussians into the other world as well as the English and the Royalists. Oh, I mean honourably, of course, with the sword or pistol. The brethren don't ask anything further of you, as you have no real vocation for Freemasonry."

"I shall do as I please, and I bind myself to nothing. If I had

known what doings you indulged in, when you asked me to join you, I should have refused at once, and, indeed, I shall never forgive you for having deceived me."

"What can you reproach me with, my poor Lucien? Come, listen to me without getting angry, and let us go over the facts. Last year, in June, you returned from Hungary, and you still were suffering from a wound in the leg, which you received before you were taken prisoner in the fight at Kulm. You came to Paris at the very moment when the allies were disporting themselves here, and as you are always hot-headed, you got yourself into difficulties all the time. One night I met you at the Palais Royal just at the very moment when you had boxed the ears of a tall, lanky German at the entrance of the wooden galleries. You flew to me, and begged of me to be your second. I had not seen you since the fight at Dresden, where I was attached to the head-quarters as a purveyor; but I remembered perfectly well that we had played more than one game together during the campaign, and I have never refused to help a comrade. I therefore agreed to go to the Bois de Boulogne with you, where you gave your opponent a bad wound, so that I thought myself called upon to tell you of a secret society, composed mostly of old republican soldiers and men of the empire, a society which aimed at ridding us first of foreigners, and then of the Bourbons. You wished to enter it——"

"I did not know its customs."

"Oh, you knew that conspiracies were formed in it, and that we had other aims besides picking quarrels with the officers of the Holy Alliance or the king's household."

"That may be; but to conspire against the government and to wall up a living man in a pillar are two very different things."

"Bah! whoever wishes to attain an object avails himself of the means of doing so; and if you had known the vile rascal who has just been removed from the face of the earth, you——"

"You knew him, then?"

"I will tell you all about him presently. Let me first finish what I was saying. You came among us, and for nine months nothing dishonourable was ever asked of you, at least not to my knowledge. We were making ready for a great military plot which was about to break forth at the moment when Bonaparte returned from the island of Elba. That fine affair suspended our operations, but we intended to resume our work, for we knew that Bonaparte's return would only result in bringing the foreigners among us again. I am now coming to a part of my story which relates to you more closely; and I am forced to remind you of it, as you seem desirous of breaking with me, your best friend—with me, Timoleon Machefer, ex-purveyor of the army, and now a dealer in salt meat in the Rue Montmartre, near the church of Saint Eustache."

"What are you trying to arrive at?" demanded Lucien, impatiently.

"I am reminding you, my dear friend, that old Machefer, here present, introduced you six months ago to his friend Thomas Vernède, a banker worth two millions, and who has, what is still better, a charming daughter, who answers to the sweet name of Thérèse."

Lucien replied in a milder tone: "I am far from ignoring the services which you rendered me, and the greatest of all was certainly that to which you now allude, but——"

"It is precisely owing to the fact that you love Mademoiselle Vernède, and hope to marry her, that you do not wish to remain a Freemason all your life, eh?" interrupted Machefer.

"And what if it be so?" said Lucien, curtly.

"Upon my word I should not blame you. A charming woman and a large fortune make it worth one's while to renounce a secret society, for there is nothing but blows to be got in that."

"If it were only the fortune——"

"I know that you are no lover of money; and, besides, you already possess very fair means."

"Not much now, unfortunately."

"No matter, you are not in a situation to expose yourself without some regret to being tried by a court of high commission, and I think that you are right."

"What! do you think that I am right in leaving the society?"

"Certainly. I like my friends for themselves, and I don't think that you act wrongly in leaving us."

"Good! but the others may not agree with you. The man they call the Grand Master—I now know only too well why they call him so—what will he think of my desertion?"

"In the first place, our chief has never forced any one to follow him. He knows, also, that you are not, and never will be a traitor, and that you will not reveal our secrets to any one whatever, even to the woman you love," added Machefer, emphasising these last words. "Moreover, he relies upon the help of your sword when the time comes for open combat."

"Did he say so to you?"

"Exactly as I tell you."

"Then he is not angry with me?"

"Not at all. He even thought your indignation quite natural."

"That did not prevent him from having me turned out and going on with that fearful execution."

"The execution was absolutely necessary; but your presence was not indispensable to the accomplishment of a great act of justice."

"Then why did he call upon me to be present?"

"Because they all wished to accustom you to their rules and customs. Conspiring is not all milk and water, and the vocation is not one fitted to everybody. You altogether lack it. We are sure of that now, and bear you no grudge on that account."

"Very good; then I am free!"

"As free as air. The Grand Master wished me to tell you so."

Lucien could not conceal his delight. "You know the Grand Master well, then?" said he, after a short silence.

"Not much better than you do. I have often been present when he presided, but I do not know his real name, and I never saw his face."

"Who initiated you?"

"A man who was formerly an adjutant in the 25th, and who died last winter. He held a sufficiently high grade in the society to have frequent relations with the chief. I receive orders by the same method as has frequently been made use of with you. A little bag of plaster is deposited by some unknown person in a corner of my shop, at dusk."

"Sometimes it is thrown in at the window of the ground-floor where I live. I leave it open on that account."

"And at the bottom of the bag there is a card bearing some written figures——"

"Which correspond with pages, lines, and words in the 'Dictionary of the Academy?'"

"Yes. You see that they act in the same way with both of us, and I know no more than you do about the great secrets of our brotherhood."

"You know one thing that I don't know, however," said Lucien.

"What is that?"

"You know how to leave the cavern without following the gallery by which you took me, and you also know what happened after I was removed."

"True; and I ask nothing better than to tell you. A quarter of an hour after the brethren had placed you at the entrance of the passage, the Grand Master, thinking that you must be gone, gave orders to light the torches again. He took some of us aside to tell them what to do until we received further orders. He then announced that the meeting was over, and we went off, as usual, one by one, by an exit on the opposite side of the Butte."

"And—what of the unfortunate man condemned to that frightful punishment?" stammered Lucien, who still felt sick at heart at thought of the sight he had beheld.

"Well, he underwent his punishment," said Machefer, coldly; "a punishment which he richly deserved, I give you my word of honour. His sufferings are over now, and he will form a part of the pillars which will uphold the Montmartre windmills until the day of judgment. Many brave men now sleeping in the swamps of the Berezhina had nothing to reproach themselves with, whereas this rascal——"

"The Berezhina!—my uncle fell there, and he was the truest and best of men," muttered Lucien, thoughtfully. "Heaven is not always just."

"It was so to-night, when it allowed a traitor to be punished as he deserved," replied the ex-purveyor.

"Perhaps so, but no matter; it is frightful to doom a man to such a death, and without even questioning him, or permitting him to justify himself."

"His crime was proved ; all defence was impossible. It was better to finish the matter at once than to let him plead and beg pardon, for he would not have failed to try to move us, like the coward he was."

"Then you approve of what was done?" asked the officer.

"Not of all. I think that he was justly treated, like the wild beast that he was, but before walling him up, he ought to have been searched."

"Searched? Why?"

"Because he might have had—indeed, he must have had papers about him which it was important for us to possess. The Grand Master did not act with his usual foresight on this occasion."

"You knew the condemned man, then?"

"Yes, and I can assure you that a more infamous scoundrel never encumbered the earth."

"So the others said, and I know what he did, but not who he was."

"And you would not be sorry to know, in order to quiet your conscience? Well, I will tell you about it. This man began by serving in the French army in Spain. Under what name we do not yet know, but we do know that he deserted in 1809, on the night before the battle of Talavera, and remained at Wellington's headquarters, and became his paid spy until the taking of Paris in 1814. It was then that he entered the 'political police,' and I assure you that he soon made himself felt. He said that he was an *émigré*, and he called himself the Chevalier de Loupiac."

"Loupiac!" repeated Lucien, "the name is not unknown to me. Ah! yes, of course, it is the name of the little place in Périgord, where I was born. It must have been a false name."

"That is very likely," resumed Machefer, "but we do not know his true name. Besides, he assumed many others, and resorted to every imaginable disguise. He had the dangerous knack of assuming all sorts of faces as well as dresses. He must have been very skilful to succeed in becoming a mason as he did. We thought for a long time that his real name was Mulot, and that he had been a captain of the Old Guard. It was his disappearance after the return from Elba that startled us at first; the Grand Master then made inquiries, and found that the contemptible rascal was betraying us; but it was only yesterday that we had complete proof of his treachery, and a certainty that after helping the Prussians to cross the Seine below Saint-Germain, he had returned to Paris. We had no time to lose in getting rid of him, for he would not have failed to have us all arrested before the end of the week. That is why the order was given to seize him this evening."

"At his house?"

"No. He did not live at the little house in Clignancourt, where our comrades arrested him, but we know that he was to meet an English spy there to-night, and our information was exact, for the capture was effected as you saw. Fortunately the scamp was

never admitted to our gatherings, and did not know where we met—there in the 'building,' as we call it—so that we did not fear being surprised during the execution at which you were present in spite of yourself."

"I am beginning to believe that the scoundrel got what he deserved," said Lucien.

"You may be sure of that, my dear friend," continued the ex-purveyor, "and I must tell you that the punishment of walling-up was resorted to because we had every interest in concealing his body. If the so-called Chevalier de Loupiac had been found dead at his house, or in the street, or even in the quarry—for everything must be thought of, and the place where we meet may one day be discovered—the police would not have failed to accuse us of the murder, and we should have been closely followed up. On the contrary, as Loupiac suddenly disappears and cannot be found, he will be thought a traitor by those who hired him. He will be accused of playing a double game, and of having joined the enemies of the government; his reports will be thrust aside as worthless, and we shall be let alone."

"That is true," muttered Lucien. "And yet to kill a man without a hearing, and without seeing his face——"

"We've seen it often enough, let me tell you, when he was coming after us to betray us, for he knew us all, or nearly all, and you, who did not even know of his existence, must have been pointed out by him. You have perhaps spoken to him without knowing who he was. He was short rather than tall, slender and delicate like a woman, with a very pale face and a mild look."

"I do not remember any such face, and it is not so surprising, as he knew so well how to disguise himself."

"Well, no matter whether you have seen him or not, his account is settled," said Machefer, philosophically. "But it is time to return to Paris, if we do not wish to sleep outside. It was announced this morning that the gates would be closed at eleven, and it is now more than half-past ten."

"Let us go, then," said Lucien.

"And it would be better," added the ex-purveyor, "to take different roads. I will go by the Barrière Rochechouart and you by Barrière Blanche. There are spies everywhere, and it is unnecessary for us to be seen together."

"You are right. We had better separate."

"Not for long, for I hope that you will come to my shop to-morrow."

"I will. And it suits me all the better, as I intend going to see Monsieur Vernède in the afternoon, and he lives near you."

"Oho!" said Machefer. "A solemn visit to the father of the harming Thérèse! Are you going to ask for her hand in marriage?"

"Perhaps so," replied Lucien in a low tone.

"I wish you good luck, then." And after a cordial embrace, the two friends parted.

II.

LUCIEN followed the advice of his comrade, and returned to the city by the Barrière Blanche. The detachment of the National Guard stationed there did not behave in a strictly military manner, and there was no difficulty in getting in when one was late, for everything was the same as though there had been peace instead of war.

Matters had greatly changed since the time when, on the 30th March, 1814, the citizen militia had defended the walls of the city, attacked by the allies. Fifteen months had passed by since then; the allies had returned, but patriotism had grown weaker; the feeling of warlike enthusiasm had given place to indifference, and at this moment no one seemed to look upon the defence of Paris as a serious matter.

In this quarter, so far from the centre of the capital, and still so thinly populated at that date, the houses were closed and the streets deserted. However, when Lucien reached the boulevard by the Chaussée d'Antin, he saw plenty of animation. Those who had any curiosity were, in spite of the late hour, crowding about the newspaper-vendors in the open-air, and reading aloud from the papers and posters. The side-streets were full of carts laden with furniture, which had been brought there by thousands of residents in the suburbs, who had beaten a hasty retreat at the approach of the enemy. Women, children, and old men were sitting about upon their mattresses for want of other resting-places.

Lucien did not stop to look at this heartrending sight, as he was very anxious to get home. He went rapidly across the boulevard, meaning to reach his abode by the shortest way. It was situated in the Rue des Bons-Enfants, and was on the ground-floor of an old house which had probably belonged to some financial "farmer-general," for it had a stylish appearance. Lucien Bellefond had hired a bachelor suite there, and had furnished it with great taste and even luxury. Although only a lieutenant on half-pay, Machefer's young friend was able to live like a gentleman, for he had inherited a nice little sum of money from his parents, and he also owned a farm in Périgord. This represented a fortune in those days, especially for an officer, and Lucien, who had been an orphan from his childhood, was very enviably situated.

Besides his patrimony, moreover, he had started in life with what are called expectations, being the favourite nephew of an uncle by marriage, an excellent uncle to inherit from, for he was considered to be a millionaire. Unfortunately, the uncle in question was also

a colonel of artillery, and had disappeared during the retreat from Russia ; while, on the other hand, Lucien had spent a part of the small fortune which he had received when he came of age.

His story was very short and simple. He had been brought up by the uncle in question, who was the husband of his mother's sister, and thus he had naturally chosen a military career. His taste was in that direction ; and, besides, under the Empire, everybody who was not blind, hump-backed, or crippled, was called upon to fight. When he left the military school in 1810 he became a sub-lieutenant in a regiment of light infantry, and started for Spain, where he went through three campaigns. He was made a lieutenant of the 25th of the line in January, 1813 ; was wounded and taken prisoner at Kulm ; and then, on the return of the Bourbons, he was put upon half-pay, and now saw himself about to end his military career at an age when one usually begins life, for he was hardly twenty-five.

However, the future did not disquiet him. He was a handsome fellow, and not less fortunately endowed both as to his heart and mind. Tall, well-made, dark, with curling hair, large eyes and dazzling teeth, this plebeian lieutenant had more native elegance than many a high-born gentleman, and his appearance was calculated to attract attention everywhere. It is needless to say that he was brave, with a reckless, almost mad bravery, and capable also of less conspicuous heroism, such as being killed at his post unseen ; moreover, he possessed a clear mind, a frank disposition, and a lively imagination ; he was generous to prodigality, easily moved, always ready to take fire at a noble action—in one word, he would have been the most desirable suitor a woman could have had ; but, alas ! he had two great defects.

He was given to gambling and to quarrelling. He was a gambler, not from love of money, but from love of excitement. He liked to struggle against fortune as well as against the Prussians. He was quarrelsome, also, but not out of innate brutality or vanity, but owing to a certain heat of the blood, which often spurred him to anger, and even made him draw his sword at the wrong moment. Owing to these faults, which were compensated for by many good qualities, Lieutenant Bellefond had had several duels, and had taken but little care of his fortune. However, all this did not prevent him from being passionately in love with a charming girl, who also loved him, and from "aspiring to her hand," as was the pompous expression of the time.

It was, as the reader knows, to Machefer that he owed his introduction to Mademoiselle Thérèse Vernède, the only heiress of her father, the richest banker in the neighbourhood of the central markets. The ex-purveyor had introduced Lucien to this opulent person, his political ally ; and the lieutenant, who had already been put on half-pay by Louis XVIII.'s Minister of War, was warmly welcomed by M. Vernède, who could not conceal his antipathy for the Government of the Restoration. This reception was followed by a silent

encouragement of the hopes that Lucien scarcely dared to indulge in. Indeed, the grave financier did not seem to look unfavourably upon the attentions of the young and ardent officer. He even seemed desirous that he should call at his house.

The enamoured lieutenant asked nothing better than to meet him half-way ; but the events of the month of March, 1815, followed ; and as long as the political crisis lasted, culminating in the defeat of Waterloo, the time did not seem properly chosen for courtship. Besides, although the banker greatly rejoiced in the overthrow of the Bourbons, he seemed more thoughtful than usual, and more engrossed with his business cares. Lucien, who was too proud to risk a rebuff, was thus waiting for a good opportunity to make a formal offer. And so after three months matters still remained as before.

The lovers were still of one mind, however, and Thérèse Vernède, whenever she went to high mass, rewarded Lucien's attention with a smile and an eloquent glance, upon finding him, as usual, on Sunday, at the door of Saint-Eustache watching for her to appear, radiant with youth and beauty. Of recent times, however, her father, on whose arm she leaned, had seemed less cordial, and the young man had thought that he could detect anxiety on the banker's face. The latter's serious countenance was indeed not calculated to encourage a lover to declare himself ; and Lucien had thought sadly of the chances of failure awaiting him.

His acquaintance with the Freemasons greatly hampered him, and he said to himself, not without good reason, that a man ought not to marry when he belongs to a secret society, and may any day be arrested. A man may love and yet conspire. That has often been proved, and will be so for all time. But to conspire and marry is another matter. In order to exterminate tyrants and thwart the police, one must be a bachelor.

Lucien, being fully persuaded of the accuracy of this axiom, felt greatly perplexed ; for, although he was not deeply concerned in the plots initiated by the Grand Master, he did not wish to break with his associates at the very moment when they were about to find themselves in danger. The scene at the quarry had come just in time to relieve him of his perplexity : after his conversation with Machefer, he looked upon himself as untrammelled, and felt delighted thereat. As he had said to the ex-purveyor, he meant on the following day to see M. Vernède, and speak to him frankly. The attempt might fail, but it would at least put an end to a false situation, and the lieutenant had a horror of uncertainty.

He hastened on and soon reached the Palais Royal. As he looked up he saw that the galleries were crowded, and the cafés still open. It thereupon occurred to him to go to the Rotunda to read the papers, in which he hoped to find some news of the war.

There had been some fighting during the night before, all along the line from Saint-Cloud to Bagneux, and Lucien now heard people saying that an armistice was expected. The thought that Paris was

about to surrender after a few insignificant skirmishes was intolerable to the lieutenant, and the words uttered by the far from warlike citizens irritated him beyond expression. He went on, however, with the laudable intention of avoiding a dispute with those who were in favour of an armistice, but when he reached the door of the café he usually patronised he was already in a very bad humour. The place was almost empty, those who had been sitting there having preferred to take the fresh air in the gardens, and the waiters themselves had left their post to mingle with the gossips who were chattering away under the trees. The woman, usually perched behind the counter, also had left her mahogany throne, and gone to talk with some old customers near the door.

Lucien saw two persons seated at a couple of tables near by, and they seemed very busy—one with some milk-posset, and the other with the *Journal de l'Empire*, which had been called the *Journal des Débats*, during the first Restoration, but which had resumed its former title since Bonaparte's return. The young fellow looked for some other paper, but they had all been taken away, and only the *Petites Affiches* was left. This did not suit him; for he did not want to find an estate to purchase, or any rooms to let, and he began to draw nearer to the gentleman who was holding the *Journal de l'Empire*.

He ended by sitting down in front of him, in order to be ready to take the paper when he laid it down; and in his impatience he began to tap upon the marble top of the little table on which the reader's glass of punch was standing.

"What do you wish?" asked the man with the newspaper, moving it aside so as to show his face.

Lucien suddenly found himself face to face with a countenance which greatly displeased him. The man with the paper was short, and although carefully dressed, he had a low, unpleasant cast of features. His hair was too light and too much frizzled up to be natural, and his whiskers, which were cut in military style, on a level with his ears, seemed out of keeping with his womanish hair. His fair complexion was not in harmony, too, with his wrinkles, which were abundant near the brow and temples, and his thin lips and retreating chin contrasted unfavourably with his aquiline nose, and his quick, eager eyes shaded by heavy eyebrows. His head seemed to be made up of unmatched pieces. Its expression was not definite, and it was hard to tell whether it was impudent or cunning. Lucien was so much struck by this strange apparition that he delayed answering the question put to him. He looked fixedly at the fellow's ugly face, and asked himself whether he had ever seen it before.

"I have had the honour of asking you what you wish," repeated the man with the paper, surveying Lucien from head to foot.

"I wish to have the *Journal de l'Empire* when you have done with it," said the lieutenant curtly.

"After me, willingly," replied the gentleman, with an ironical

grimace ; " but I have only just begun with it, and I read everything, even the theatrical advertisements."

Lucien started from his seat with a threatening gesture. He was about to box the man's ears. But a prudent thought restrained the irascible young officer. He said to himself that a man who is on the point of proposing in marriage, and who has the happiness of his whole life at stake, ought not to get into trouble by quarrelling with a stranger, and so he contained himself. However, his wisdom did not go so far as to make him leave the place.

He seated himself more at ease on his stool, leant his elbow upon the table, and once more began to tap the measure of a march of the 25th of the line ; at the same time keeping his eyes fixed upon the impertinent individual who had ventured to answer him so rudely. He did not have to endure the sight of his countenance very long, for the fellow soon hid himself again behind the paper and resumed his reading.

Lucien's fingers itched to snatch this shield from before his face, and he was perhaps about to do so when his eyes accidentally fell upon the other customer who was drinking his milk-posset near by. This person was a fat little old man with a pleasant face ; he was dressed neatly, and he looked like a middle-class Parisian in easy circumstances, who had spent his life in selling brown sugar or tape by the yard. He was busily dipping a roll into his glass, as if to hide his embarrassment, and he looked at his neighbours with so comical and so sincere an expression of terror that the lieutenant was seized with a wild inclination to laugh, and quite forgot his anger.

He thought how ridiculous it would be to make a spectacle of himself before this grotesque individual, and considered that it would be better to wait till the following day to learn the news. He had better go off quietly to bed without troubling himself any further about his opposite neighbour ; and he even made a motion as if to rise, when, unfortunately, the voice of the man behind the paper fell upon his ears and brought back his former anger.

" How interesting these theatrical announcements are ! " said the strange-looking man. " The Théâtre Français and the Opéra-Comique are to be closed ; but there is ' Alceste ' and the ' Village Trial ' at the Grand Opera this evening ; and all the smaller theatres are open, too, just as though Wellington were still at his headquarters at Ghent. Upon my word," he continued to himself, " they are playing the ' Magpie of Palaiseau ' and the ' Precipice ' and the ' Marquis of Carabas ' at the Gaité ; at the Ambigu there is the ' Banished Son ' and the ' Child Flung Through the Window ' ; at the Porte Saint-Martin, ' God, Honour, and the Ladies, ' with the ' Shepherd of the Sierra Morena. ' It is truly wonderful, and does honour to the feelings of the Parisians."

" Those Parisians who go to the play when our soldiers are fighting for them are simply wretches and cowards," remarked Lucien, in a very aggressive tone.

"And besides," resumed the reader, who did not appear to have heard this interruption, for he went on enumerating the announcements, "there are the balls and shows open as though nothing were going on. At Tivoli, in the Rue Saint-Lazare, there is a great fête. At Vauxhall, on the Boulevard Saint-Martin, there is a dance with soli by Colinet the younger. In the Rue de Castiglione there is a living male rhinoceros, five years old, on show. In the Cour des Fontaines there is the Hottentot Venus, and the price is three francs for the best seats and two for the others."

"Are you making fun of me, sir?" now asked the young officer, thrusting aside the sheet which contained all this interesting information.

The man whom he addressed put down his screen, looked at Lucien quietly, and replied: "I do not understand you at all, sir."

"You do not understand me," replied the exasperated officer; "well, then, I will explain myself more clearly. I think it is outrageous that you should go over all the theatrical news when you know that I am waiting for the paper."

"I am very sorry, sir; but this paper is very well got up, and I wish to read it all," replied the stranger coolly. And then he again began to read: "It is remarked that Paris is perfectly quiet, although fighting is going on at twenty points under our walls. At the Tuileries to-day — Sunday — the chief avenue was filled with women, and the men, who were seated under the trees, were passing newspapers about as quietly as though the fighting had been in India. The same is the case on the boulevards and in the cafés. The surrounding armies have not even caused the theatres to close.' Well, he's right, this editor; I myself have noticed that everybody looks gay, and, like him, I admire the feelings of these good people——"

"That is too much!" exclaimed Lucien furiously at this moment, and he tore the unlucky paper from the reader's hands and threw it to the other end of the room.

"Do you understand now that your remarks annoy me as much as your face disgusts me?" he added, rising.

The stranger did not flinch, nor did any colour appear upon his pale face. It was in the calmest tone imaginable that he replied to this angry outburst by saying: "You wish to pick a quarrel with me, do you, sir?"

"I do not wish to pick one; I have quarrelled with you already," replied Lucien. "You have acted towards me with unpardonable insolence, and you shall make reparation. Here is my card."

The man quietly took up the printed card which the young officer threw at him and began to spell it out aloud: "Lucien Bellefond—lieutenant—of—of— Excuse my weak sight, sir," he added, shutting up his cat-like eyes.

"I do not excuse anything; you will have time to read my card

at home," replied Lucien. "Give me yours, so that I may know where to send my seconds to you to-morrow."

"You must do without my name and address, sir," replied the stranger, quietly; "I have yours, and that is enough, as I am the offended party, and it is my place to give you satisfaction—when it suits me. I shall have to make you wait forty-eight hours, however, for I am going on a little journey to-morrow morning early, and shall not get back till Tuesday evening. However, I hope that on Wednesday at the latest you will have news of me." As he spoke he slipped his adversary's card into his pocket, and pushed back his chair, in view of rising up and leaving.

The little old man had not lost a word of the altercation, but had made haste to swallow his milk-posset in order to depart as quickly as possible from the perilous neighbourhood of the quarrellers, who he expected would come to blows.

"Do you imagine that matters can pass in that way?" exclaimed the officer. "You think that I will let you go without knowing where to find you, to cut off your ears?"

"You will not cut off my ears; but I promise you that you shall see me again in three days' time," replied the stranger, tapping with a coin upon the table, so as to summon the waiter.

"And I tell you that you shall not leave till you have told me who you are," howled Lucien, stretching out his arm to take the stranger by the collar. But the fellow quickly got out of the way. He stooped down, went round the table, ran to the counter, upon which he threw a five franc piece, and then he disappeared in the crowd before his adversary had recovered from his surprise. He went off so fast, indeed, that he nearly upset the old man, who barely escaped being choked by the last bit of his roll.

Lucien, amazed by this game of hide-and-seek, remained standing in the café, and asked himself whether he had better pursue the fugitive; however, he soon said to himself that so cowardly a rascal was not worth following. Besides, his anger was over, and he reflected that this insolent, cunning scoundrel might well be a police spy. He realised that he had acted wrongly in handing him his card, and admitted that he had again been wanting in prudence. He went out of the café by the door-way facing the gardens, and strolled towards the wooden gallery, intending to reach the Rue des Bons-Enfants by the Cour des Fontaines. He was going thoughtfully along the almost deserted pathway near the ornamental water, when he felt a hand laid upon his arm. He quickly turned, thinking that his adversary had changed his mind, but found himself facing the man who had been taking the milk-posset.

The meeting was strange, to say the least; and Lucien, who had not given a thought to the ridiculous old soul, stopped short in amazement at recognising the stupid countenance of the sole witness of the quarrel. As he still had his head full of the idea that he had been quarrelling with some detective or other, he was naturally

inclined to look upon every one as something of the same sort, and the first idea that occurred to him was, that the little old man had followed him to find out where he was going. So he turned angrily, and his threatening face might well have made a timid man fly off. However, instead of recoiling, the old boy smiled pleasantly, and looked at Lucien with a gentle air. "Young man," said he, mildly, "will you allow me to give you a little advice?"

"I do not know you," replied Lucien, "and I do not want any advice from you."

"One always needs disinterested advice," resumed the old man in a coaxing tone.

"What do you require? Why have you followed me?"

"I wish to beg of you to be prudent; and if I have followed you, it was only to prevent another person from doing so."

"I do not understand you."

"What, sir! don't you know that you have been quarrelling with a police spy? The man who was reading the paper only did it to provoke you, and find out your way of thinking. I signed to you not to reply; but, unfortunately, you did not honour me with a look, and so you were caught."

"Very good. I certainly do believe that man to be a spy. However, it is of no account."

"You are wrong in defying the police, young man. It is formidable at all times, but in a few days it will be all-powerful; for the government which the allies will bring in again will wish for revenge upon all those who overthrow it, and patriots will be tracked like wild beasts. Now, you are a patriot, and——"

"What do you know about it?" interrupted Lucien, distrustfully, for this assertion seemed like a cunning question.

"I saw that just now," replied the old man, more gently than before. "You took the part of the brave defenders of our country, and you properly condemned those cowardly Parisians, who amuse themselves while others are being killed for them, and rejoice at the arrival of the invader."

This enthusiastic and warlike tirade, coming from this timid-looking old man, seemed so strange to Lucien that he no longer doubted but what he had met a spy of a more dangerous kind even than the newspaper reader, and he made up his mind to get rid of this insinuating individual at once. "Is that all you have got to say to me?" he asked, gruffly.

"No, sir," replied the old man, quietly. "I ran after you to advise you not to go home to-night. You were imprudent enough to give that rascal your card; he now knows where you live, and he will find out to-night if you gave him a correct address."

"If he dares to come where I live, I——"

"He is not such a fool as to do that, he'll send some subordinate spy or other, and to-morrow you will be set down as suspicious; and arrested before the end of the week."

"You must be insane!"

"Not at all, young man; and I assure you that I have only your welfare in view. I even advise you to change your lodgings as soon as possible. You are an officer on half pay——"

"Who told you that?"

"It is easy to see; and, besides, I heard that rascal read your name and rank aloud. I know everything, excepting your place of residence."

"And you would like to know that, too, would you not?" asked the lieutenant with suppressed anger.

"Yes, indeed; for I might be useful to you. I am only an old man, but I have some means of protecting young men, and if you will allow me to enter upon relations with you, you will not regret it."

Lucien now thought that he knew enough. The very obliging individual before him, who was so anxious to become his protector, could only be a detective—perhaps a confederate of the fellow whom he ostensibly denounced—and the offer of his services was but a blind to bring Lucien into some trap or other on account of his patriotic views. The lieutenant was even surprised that the fellow should have recourse to such poor tactics, and considered his cunning far from deep. "Do you know, sir," said he, looking the old man straight in the face, "that I have a great mind to wring your neck?"

"What! what!" stammered the old man, stepping back.

"Or to break your head, as you deserve," resumed Lucien, whose long-restrained anger broke forth at last. "We are alone here, and if I choose, I can crush you, you vile snake!"

"Young man, young man, you are mistaken, I assure you!"

"No, no; I know very well whom I am dealing with; and if I don't knock you down on the spot, it is only because I shrink from touching you, do you hear? Begone! I will let you off this time, but do not trouble me again; for if ever I find you in my way again I'll exterminate you."

"I'm going, my dear sir, I'm going!"

"You had better go, and I advise you not to follow me, for I have good eyes, and if I find you at my heels, I shall turn back and make you repent it!"

Then, without waiting to hear any more, the fiery lieutenant darted out of the avenue, rapidly crossed the garden, and disappeared under the arches of the Galerie de Valois.

The old man, as may be imagined, did not follow him. He remained under the trees, having lost countenance at Lucien Bellefond's outbreak, but not so much frightened as might be supposed; for he drew a fine gold snuff-box from his pocket, and quietly took a pinch of snuff. "The fool!" he muttered, closing his box again, and putting it into his pocket. "There's no trusting to appearances. There's a young fellow whom I met by chance,

and who seems to me to possess all the indispensable qualities of the man I want to find ; he is young and brave, and evidently poor ; and he seems to me to be intelligent also. I attempted to win him over, but he revolts at once, and threatens to break my head. He takes me for an accomplice of that gallows-bird, that detective, who just tricked him at the café of the Rotunda. Fool, fool that he is ! Well, let him go to the devil ! I shall not run after him. There is nothing to be done with these soldiers of Bonaparte ; they are only fit to kill people in a stupid way, and I had better look elsewhere." Thereupon the old man turned aside and walked to the garden steps without looking back. He had evidently forgotten the officer, as he proceeded in an opposite direction.

What was he thinking of as he went along the sidewalk of the Rue Neuve des Petits Champs, which he followed on the right hand as he left the Palais Royal ? The passers-by would have been astute indeed could they have guessed the thoughts that were swarming in his head, covered by a brown wig, and shaded by a low-brimmed hat. His pale, flabby old face merely expressed stolid satisfaction ; his eyes, which were grey, and half-closed, revealed nothing whatever. His gait was commonplace, being neither over slow, like that of a man who felt bored, nor too fast, like that of a man who was very busy.

His attire did not reveal anything to the observer who might have attempted to ascertain his social standing by his dress. This old man—if, indeed, he were an old man—for he might have been fifty as easily as seventy—was clad in a blue coat, with brass buttons, a white waistcoat, a white tie, and nankeen pantaloons, which were too short ; he had silk stockings, and silver buckles to his shoes, and looked like a head-clerk, or a retired trader, or a writing-master, or almost anything of the same sort. He was, in a word, a walking enigma, but one that nobody cared to unravel, for he attracted no attention whatever.

He went on to the Place des Victoires, and then turned into one of the side streets which cross between the Rue Montmartre, the church of Saint-Eustache, and the Rue Coquillière. Presently he stopped at a little door in a windowless wall, and looked around him ; then, seeing that no one was near, he took a key from his waistcoat pocket and thrust it into the keyhole of the mysterious door. The latter at once opened noiselessly, and then the man with the blue coat slipped into the house, keeping close to the wall. The door, which he closed behind him carefully, conducted to a hall badly lighted by a smoky lamp, under which a man wearing a kind of grey livery was sleeping, as he sat on an old cane chair. " Ah ! is it you, Monsieur Saint-Privat ? " said he, rubbing his eyes as he suddenly woke up. " How early you are to-night ! "

" True," muttered the old man, " it is not midnight yet ; but I suppose there must be more to do than usual, and I wish to get everything off by the morning mail."

"You're always in earnest, Monsieur Saint-Privat. Ah! if everybody were only like you!"

"Bah! I don't wish to be late this last time, for I may never come here again. My successor will have no reason to complain."

"The last time? Your successor? What, sir, do you think——"

"I think that Louis XVIII. will be restored to the throne this very week, and that his ministers will not fail to dismiss a man employed by the so-called usurper. So, Jérémie, prepare yourself to clean up the office for another man to occupy it. Is the mail in?"

"Yes, sir; the minister sent the packet as usual. He told his secretary that he wished it to be all sent off before eight o'clock. But you may be sure that I shall regret you, Monsieur Saint-Privat, and with all my heart."

"All right; keep your bows for the fool who will take my place," replied the old man, drily, and he added with a sneer: "As you're so fond of me, I hope that you have lit my lamp, and that I shall be able to see in the 'dark room.'"

"You're always lively, Monsieur Saint-Privat," replied the office attendant. "Ah! you're a philosopher, so you are! and I know plenty of people who would not take things so quietly as you do."

"My philosophy is my six thousand francs a year," replied the old man with a shrug. "I have enough to live on without working, and at my age I have a right to rest. Good-night, Jérémie; I don't need you any longer, and you may go to bed. I will leave my report in an envelope in the upper drawer of the desk."

"Very well, Monsieur Saint-Privat; the minister shall have it when he gets up. I have the honour to bid you good-night."

The worthy old man with the nankeen breeches then went on through the hall, and ascended a little staircase on the right, stepping quickly like one who knew the way well; and after a few turns he came to a door which seemed to be of one piece with the wall, opened it with a small key which he wore upon his watch-chain, and then entered a strange-looking room. It was a large, square apartment, the walls of which, covered with green paper, were concealed by boxes with labels upon them. There were no windows to be seen; air, but not light, came in through two apertures with funnels, as in a prison. There was no furniture, excepting a large table and a leather-seated arm-chair. Upon this table, and in front of the chair, there was some paper, pens, an inkstand, a sand-box, and erasers; in fact, the usual apparatus seen on writing-tables. Then, close at hand, and on the right of the chair, there was an assortment of unusual utensils—large knives and penknives of a strange shape, seals, stamps, and wafers, and pots of paste, sticks of sealing-wax, and a brass kettle above a spirit lamp. On the left there was a large basket in which lay packets of square and oblong letters of grey or white paper, but all closed and marked with post-office stamps. The

worthy Jérémié had been careful to light the lamp, as he had told his respectable master; and, besides, he had lit a candelabrum with four branches bearing tapers. Monsieur Saint-Privat's words were fully justified, for one could see admirably well in the "dark room."

This place, which the present generation knows only by hearsay, then enjoyed a formidable notoriety, and it was only necessary to mention it to make everybody speak low, as though the secrecy of one's conversation would be violated like that of the letters opened in this strange apartment. And it was not without due cause that all classes felt alarmed when the terrible question of opening letters was started—that form of spying more perfidious and dangerous than anything else carried on by the secret police. In the dark room one's very thoughts were spied upon; and no one was sure of escaping the organised treachery which did not respect private revelations, any more than it did political statements. Every one spoke of this abominable inquisition; no one doubted but what it worked incessantly, and yet no one could have proved that it really existed, so great were the precautions taken.

This was because the dark room had been brought to a high degree of perfection since its foundation, an hundred and fifty years previously. It was first started in Hamburg, it is said, where it enabled the city magistrates of that free spot to watch the rich merchants, whose commercial operations might have injured the Hanscatic League; and it was first introduced into France towards the middle of the reign of Louis XIV., becoming, under Louis XV., almost a State institution. It then served to amuse the king, who often felt bored. Every day a quantity of scandalous stories were found in private letters, and the weary monarch was entertained with them. The Revolution did away with the dark room, but it was re-established later on, and became of immense importance under the first Empire, being one of the great features of the police system which was reorganised on a bolder basis.

The Restoration did not deprive itself of this precious means of spying, and after the fall of Bonaparte nothing was changed in the dark room, save as regards the missives which were read there. In the usurper's time, the letters of the royalists were opened; while the Bourbon Government unsealed the correspondence of the usurper's partisans. This shameful system of spying did not end till after the Revolution of July, and it was, perhaps, even revived again, and again it disappeared. The evil was at least an intermittent one.

It would be a great mistake to suppose that the post-office administration ever took part in these contemptible practices. It is true that some of the functionaries unconsciously and indirectly assisted the agents charged with this ignoble task; but the police alone were culpable—the police of the Empire and the Restoration, who did not hesitate at anything. They entrusted the unworthy mission of violating private secrets to a limited number of reliable and skilful men; often to one alone, and this man, who was liberally paid, crept out

of his house every night like a thief, and repaired to a secret place, where the hirelings beneath him had already placed the letters which were to be reported upon.

This man found everything that he needed : fine blades to part the folds of envelopes, gum to take impressions, hot irons to melt sealing-wax, and steam to soften wafers. The work was performed methodically and quickly. The spy copied out the more important letters, made extracts from others, which it was important for the government to know of, then closed them again so skilfully that it could not be seen that they had been opened, and finally sent them to the regular offices, where nothing was suspected, and they were then dispatched to their addresses.

At the beginning of July, 1815—this exceptional spy, the executioner of this low government work, the powerful and obscure agent whom no one knew, and who held the life and honour of thousands of citizens in his hands—was the man who had taken the milk-posset—the little fat man whom Lucien had repulsed when he made his more or less sincere offers of service, and whom Jérémie, the servant, had called by the name of Saint-Privat.

Was this his real name, or was Saint-Privat merely an assumed cognomen? There were two or three leading police officials who could have told the truth on this point, for he had served them all at this confidential post, having been placed there in 1805. It is probable, too, that this was not the beginning of his career as a spy, and that he had previously distinguished himself by some brilliant achievements, for there were a great many conspirators under the Consulate as well as under the Directory. However, he was looked upon as a highly respectable man in the neighbourhood where he lived, and indeed the inhabitants of the Rue des Moineaux, in which he had resided for ten years, esteemed him greatly for his regular habits, his quiet ways, and his unfailing obligingness. He was not known to have either wife or child ; but he did not hesitate to mention that he was a widower, and had made a small fortune in business. No one asked anything further of him, and as he occupied a small house, where there was no doorkeeper, no one had ever discovered that he went out regularly every night at twelve, and did not return till seven in the morning.

In 1814, in the month of April, the worthy Saint-Privat lost his position. The new government—the Restoration—mistrusted him—wrongfully, perhaps, for he did not enunciate any decided political opinions, and he was well-acquainted with the old customs of the dark room. After Napoleon's return from Elba he had been diligently sought for, and had made some difficulty about returning to his place, for he did not believe that Bonaparte would be able to remain in France. The second Restoration was now already looming ahead, and he so fully expected to be dismissed again that he had announced his coming departure to Jérémie.

However, Saint-Privat was a model employee, and considered that

he was bound to send in his reports until he was actually removed. This is why he seated himself as usual at his table, between his utensils for stealing secrets, and the basketful of letters waiting to be opened.

He seemed, however, to be less anxious than usual to begin his work, for he took a pinch of snuff, and leaning back in his leather-seated arm-chair, he became absorbed in thought. The subject of his meditation must have been interesting, for, forgetting that he was alone, he began to talk aloud as though communicating his secret thoughts to some one near him.

"It is a pity," he muttered; "that tall officer would have suited me exactly. I need a bold fellow, an intelligent man, desirous of earning a living. I suspect that he had all the qualifications necessary for working under my orders. He is too irascible, and he entirely lacks prudence; still I could have schooled him properly." Thereupon Saint-Privat heaved a deep sigh, and at last he resumed: "Yes, I must make use of the leisure which I shall now have before me. To remain idle at my age, when I have twenty plans for making a deal of money, would be too stupid. They are going to send me away, that is certain—unless Fouché returns to office; but, no; a regicide cannot be a minister of Louis XVIII. That would be outrageous; and besides, even if he were nominated, which cannot happen, I know that he would try to be more of a royalist than the king himself, and would send me away, to reward me for having served him in the Georges Cadoudal affair. The only course for me is to start a detective business on my own account, but I need an assistant for my bold moves; that officer at the café in the rotunda would have suited me exactly, but it is idle to think of him now. Ha! ha!" he resumed, with a little dry laugh like the rattling of some nuts in a bag, "the business is not a bad one if a person only knows how to turn everything to account. Ah, if I merely had some family secret to make money out of; but one does not find such a thing very easily. Bah! everything comes to those who know how to wait, and, thank Heavens, I have enough to live on. Let me get to work."

With this wise conclusion, the mild old man began his operations. As he was naturally methodical, he first took up a long sheet of paper on which were the names of those whose letters lay in the basket. It was a kind of alphabetical reference to facilitate the work.

"Let me see," growled Saint-Privat, "where shall I begin to-night?"

And he began to read the initials.

"'Royalist agents.' I will keep those for the last."

"'Foreign spies.' Too late to think of them when Wellington's head-quarters are at Gonesse."

"'Secret societies. Jacobin doings.' The fools! they trouble themselves about Jacobins, and other revolutionary idiots, when they

have but a day more to remain in power. They would do better to leave the Jacobins to worry the Bourbons. However, let me see the names," he added, disdainfully. And almost immediately he exclaimed :

"Dear me! This is strange. 'Lucien Bellefond, half-pay lieutenant.' Why, that's my young man of the café, and he is at the head of the list of suspected persons. Yes, indeed! that is really the name that the man with the newspaper read aloud when he was holding the card which that reckless fellow threw at him. What a strange coincidence! It seems as though I were fated to occupy myself with him to-night; but who the deuce would think that such a crack-brained fellow could be a conspirator? The fact is, the partisans of the Robespierre system are so silly that they enlist anybody; and, provided they swear in some dark cellar to exterminate kings and emperors, they don't care who comes along. The idea of securing the services of an officer, a regular rioter, a man who proclaims his way of thinking at a coffee-house! Ah! there's nothing like a good old-fashioned Jacobin for stupidity." And he added, stroking his chin with a self-satisfied air: "Upon my word! I am delighted that I did not settle anything with the lieutenant. What should I have done, for pity's sake, with a man who has compromised himself by joining some secret society? He would have been a pretty fellow to help me in my little affairs. Well, let me see what this letter addressed to him contains."

Saint-Privat took up one of the packets of the pile in the basket, and began to look over the letters it contained. At the fifth one he stopped.

"Here it is," said he, pulling out a folded letter, wafered up, and having no envelope. Then he read the address aloud:

"'MONSIEUR LUCIEN BELLEFOND,
'Lieutenant in the 25th Regiment of the line, Paris.'

"No street given. It seems that his correspondent does not know where he lives; perhaps that is why he did not pre-pay the letter. Well, let me see the stamp. Ah! 'Perigueux, 28th June.' So there are conspirators at Perigueux, it appears. I thought there were only truffles," muttered the worthy Saint-Privat, who did not scorn either a dinner or a joke. "But there's nothing to show that this is about politics. The paper is common, it is true, but the writing is as fine as a woman's. I'll wager that those fools of the provisional government are making me lose my time reading some love-sick shop-girl's letter to this officer. However, we shall see," he resumed, handling the missive. "Good! sealed with a wafer! Oh! how trustful youth is to believe in wafers! A wafer makes my business an easy one," muttered the good old man, as he held the letter over the steam rising from the kettle. "There! it is done," he added, after a few seconds. "We shall be able to read the heart of the little sentimentalist. This note must be as

silly as can be imagined ; but the style will amuse me all the same. I always had a liking for sentimental women."

The wafer had softened, and the poor letter, the secrets of which the old rascal was about to steal, lay open before him. He spread it out without any hesitation, and then read : "Monsieur Lucien——"

"Ah !" said he, "'Monsieur' is not a very tender beginning. Can I be mistaken, and can this come from some revolutionary girl whom a secret society has ordered to write to a confederate ?"

The good man was evidently inclined to joke that night. "Well, let me see the rest," said he, gaily. "The love may be at the end. 'Monsieur Lucien,'" he now read, "'you probably have no remembrance of me ; and I should not take the liberty of writing to you if it were not about a matter of great importance to yourself, and if I were not anxious to tell you some good news.'"

"Humph !" growled Saint-Privat, "this is not amusing ; but it must be looked into. 'I have just come from Russia——' Oho ! is there a mistake in the classification ? Can it belong to the packet of the letters from foreign spies ? We'll see. 'I have just come from Russia, and when you see my name at the end of this letter, you will certainly remember that I went through the campaign of 1812 with the 9th Light Artillery, commanded by your deceased uncle, Colonel Lacaussade.'"

"Dash it !" exclaimed the director of the dark room ; "now, it seems that the writer is a sutler-woman. There can be no doubt that it is a woman. And yet the style is very good for a mere canteen girl ; besides, the writing is delicate. It grows interesting ! Let me see the rest. 'You certainly learned that this brave and unfortunate officer was reported as having disappeared since the affair of the 28th of November, 1812, after being very badly wounded by a bombshell while he was protecting the passage of the bridges near Stundzianka with his last battery. However, the colonel fell that very night into the hands of the Russians, and was drafted to Smolensk, with a column of prisoners, of whom I was one, having myself been captured by the Cossacks of Tchitchagoff's corps.'"

"Drafted ! The technical word ! This woman certainly served in the army," exclaimed Saint-Privat. "'Your much-regretted uncle had always treated me kindly, and I had the honour of belonging to his part of the country. I was, therefore, glad to be able to take good care of him during the journey, which he bore courageously ; but I had the sorrowful task of closing his eyes a few days later, on the 5th December, in fact—at the Smolensk hospital. His last thoughts were of France and of you, Monsieur Lucien, for he loved you as though you had been his own son. I mourned for him ; but I had the consolation of hoping that he had found a place in the paradise of the brave.'"

This pompous phrase made Saint-Privat smile, although he was looking thoughtful, and he muttered : "Now she expresses herself

like a tragic actress ; but never mind, I am anxious to know what all this amounts to." And he resumed his perusal. "Knowing that you must be deeply grieved by his death, I would gladly spare you these painful particulars ; but I have a sacred duty to fulfil. Colonel Lacaussade, before he expired, charged me with a mission which I swore to accomplish faithfully, as soon as I returned to France ; and I am now able, after more than thirty months of captivity, to execute his last wishes. A few days after his death I left Smolensk. I was placed with a column of prisoners formed of the soldiers of Marshal Victor's corps ; I was sent to the frontiers of Siberia, and remained in the government of Orenburg, where I remained until peace was declared. When I was restored to liberty in June, 1814, I immediately set out for France. But I had no resources, and was consequently forced to earn my living on my way. I came on foot, from city to city, through Poland and Germany, and sold little baskets which I made on the road ; however, I was sometimes obliged to beg."

"This is admirable," muttered Saint-Privat, "this sutler has a very wordy style, however. What the deuce can she be driving at ? 'I finally reached Kehl on the 9th of the present month ;' " he read with a growl. "'I had been for a whole year attempting to reach my country, having been twice arrested and imprisoned as a beggar without a passport. From Strasbourg I went to Besançon, thence to Lyons, and on to Perigueux, where I was born, and still have some relations living. I arrived here a few days ago, and my first care is to let you know where I am. I have been told that you were put on half-pay immediately after the return of the Bourbons, and that you were in Paris ; but no one can tell me where you live. That is why, Monsieur Lucien, I have made up my mind to write to you, thinking that this letter may reach you through the Minister of War, for the abodes of the officers on half-pay must be known to him.'"

"Not badly reasoned, upon my word," said Saint-Privat, pausing in his perusal ; "it is clear that this woman has been in the service ; but what in the world has she got to tell this Lucien ? 'This letter is to announce that I shall soon come to Paris, for which city I shall start to-day by coach——' Ah ! she will be in Paris. What can she have to tell the lieutenant that is so very urgent ? 'A member of my family has lent me the money for the journey, and I shall be able to stay in the city long enough to find you. I do not tell you my address, for I do not know where I shall stay ; but if, as I hope, my letter reaches you before my arrival, I venture to ask you to write to me *poste restante*, to tell me where I can meet you.' " Here the spy paused in his perusal, to remark : "What a profusion of words ! What a long while coming to nothing at all, most likely ! I really am a fool to go on. However, as I have begun, I may as well finish : 'While waiting till I can pay you my respects in person, I hasten to inform you that before dying in my arms, Colonel Lacaussade made a will, by which you became his sole heir——' Aha !" said Saint-Privat, "now I am beginning to feel

interested. 'This will, in due form, was confided to me by the colonel, who made me swear to give it to you only, and with my own hands. He explained to me why he thought best to take these precautions, and you undoubtedly know his reasons. I need not tell you that I have carefully preserved the document, which he penned with his own hand, and it is now in my possession. The certificate of your uncle's death was made out by the officials of the Smolensk hospital, and it will be easy for you to procure a copy of it by writing to Russia.' Of course it will," said Saint-Privat at this point; "and he'll do it, especially if the inheritance be worth the trouble. That is what I want to know."

"I must now inform you, Monsieur Lucien," he read, "'that I have not told this secret to any one, not even to the relations with whom I have been living, and for this reason: I learned here that, as the death of your regretted uncle had not been legally proved, his property was still in charge of his agent, who invests the income as it comes in, so that the fortune which will revert to you by the will now amounts—so I hear in the country—to more than two millions of francs.'"

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Saint-Privat, jumping up, "two millions! well, that changes the look of the thing, and the sutler woman is really a good soul. Let me see the finish: 'They also say, at Perigueux, that the agent declared, about three months ago, that measures were being taken to induce the courts to issue a "declaration of absence" that would require him to give "provisional possession" of your uncle's property to his nearest relative, his dead sister's son, Monsieur Maxime Trimoulac, and it is thought that these measures were taken at this nephew's request. You must know that he left the country some time ago, and had a bad reputation. The colonel did not like him. That is why I have thought best to hold my tongue with regard to the will until I can place it in your hands.'"

"Worthy sutler! I bless you!" ejaculated the spy, "and you have the wisdom of the serpent, besides talking business like a lawyer. But let us come to the end: 'As I am not acquainted with Paris, and no one knows what may happen, I have taken precautions to prevent the colonel's will from being found, even if the persons interested in destroying it should learn that I have it, and lay a trap for me to steal it from me. In this letter, which may not reach you, I will not tell you what means I have taken to prevent any accident; but I will do so when I have the pleasure of seeing you. While waiting for that occasion, allow me, Monsieur Lucien, to sign myself, with deep respect and attachment, your very humble and devoted servant,"

"ZENOBIA CAPITAIN."

That was all. Saint-Privat laid down the letter and exclaimed: "I was looking for a secret to turn to account. If this is not, one I must be greatly mistaken!"

The director of the dark room seemed quite transformed. His eyes shone like live coals, his thin lips were curved into a smile, and his hand trembled as he took a pinch of snuff from his gold box, in view of clearing his over-excited brain. "Let me see," he muttered, "I must be calm, and not allow my delight to confuse me. Let me go over the facts set forth in this lucky letter. I did right to come here to work to-night as though I were not to be dismissed to-morrow. Virtue is always rewarded." And then he began to read the letter again with the utmost attention.

"The situation is this," he muttered at last. "A colonel who died at Smolensk has left his entire property to a lieutenant, who is not his nearest heir. Two millions ! there are not many colonels who possess that amount. But why the deuce should not this lieutenant inherit from him, as the colonel was his uncle ? Ah ! I see ! he was an uncle by marriage. Lacaussade and Bellefond, the handsome lieutenant's father, must have married two sisters. Then Bellefond, the son, is not a blood relation to this Lacaussade. Now the heir-at-law is a certain Maxime Trimoulac, the son of a Lacaussade, the colonel's own sister, and he is trying to get a declaration of absence recorded—not knowing of the colonel's death—so as to obtain temporary possession of the property. Now let me return to the suttler woman, the good and sensible Zenobia Capitaine. What a name ! it seems to have been expressly invented for her—she possesses the secret of the will, and she alone, and she is keeping it for Lucien, her darling, whom she must have held upon her knees when he was an infant, for this Zenobia cannot be young. She would not have gone with the 19th artillery to Russia had she been young. Be that as it may, I shall not have any trouble in finding her, for there cannot be two persons of that name in all France. Now, let me proceed."

Saint-Privat always proceeded methodically, and he only spoke to himself in this fashion in order to classify in his own mind all the information which chance had placed in his way, and which he meant to turn to account. "I was saying," he resumed, "that the ingenious suttler woman was leaving for Paris when her letter was sent. She took the usual coach. The post does not go any faster. She must have arrived to-night, or will be here to-morrow. I must inquire at the Messageries Impériales, or rather *Royales*, as the empire is upset again. Nothing can be easier. Where did she go ? There is nothing to show that. However, to find a woman like that in Paris will not be a difficult matter. I will describe her without having seen her. Five feet three inches, with a red face, and the air of an artilleryman in petticoats. However, she speaks of the precautions which she will take to avoid falling, will and all, into the clutches of a person interested in stealing the document from her—that is, Trimoulac himself. What can these precautions be ? Perhaps a false name. I must find out. But no ; she must mean that she has hidden the will somewhere, in her petticoats,

or her shoes, not that she will hide herself. Now, let us come to Trimoulac. Where is he? What is he doing? Why did he leave Périgueux, and why has he delayed claiming the inheritance so long? These are points to be cleared up as soon as possible; nothing can be known as yet. I will, if need be, ask the colonel's agent. He must be acquainted with the heir-at-law."

The man of the dark room now paused, probably to reflect upon the points which he had been enumerating. He presently resumed in a slow way, like an arithmetician doing a sum: "Let me come to the present time. An inheritance of two millions, and there are three persons interested in it—the heir-at-law, the real heir, and the nurse of the dead man. To pocket all, or a part of the colonel's inheritance, that is what I, Saint-Privat, must manage to do, and I must find out how to do it. I can discover how, as I hold this precious clue, the letter, with which I must reach Zenobia. When I have found the suttler woman I shall be absolute master of the situation, unless I am a fool.

"But I must find her before Trimoulac hears of her arrival, and before she meets the lieutenant. The great point is that; for if either of the two men thrusts himself in my way, the game will be lost. They would not need my services. So I must above all make haste, so as to keep Zenobia to myself. When I have her, I shall know how to hold her. It will suffice to tell her that I am Lucien's friend, and that I alone can restore him to her. I will tell her that he is being persecuted for his opinions, and is hiding somewhere. It will be very easy. Zenobia will become my best friend, and will end by intrusting the will to me."

The good old man thereupon rubbed his hands and took three pinches of snuff. But his face suddenly overclouded. "Yes," said he, "she does not know the officer's address, but it is known at the war office, and if she takes it into her head to go there when she leaves the coach, why, then, I shall be too late. But I'm a fool to disturb myself for nothing. Ever since they have been fighting near Paris, the war office has been upset, and the clerks have something else to do besides answering questions. And then, the capitulation will be signed to-morrow or the next day. The office will then be occupied by the allies, who would turn Zenobia out if she dared to show her face there. It is clear that I have nothing to fear, for I have plenty of time before me."

Saint-Privat's face cleared for a moment; then he frowned again. He still had to solve the hardest part of the problem. "Let us suppose," he muttered, "that the suttler woman confides in me. The will would then be in my hands, as she and I alone know of its existence or where it is. How could I obtain a share of the fortune of which I know the secret? By treating with one or the other of the two claimants, that is clear."

After asking himself this question, he began to ponder more deeply than ever, and remained for fully five minutes with his head on his

hands before he again began to talk to himself. "In the first place, I can come to an understanding with Trimoulac," he muttered. "I can go to him and tell him that I know of a will of his uncle's, which entirely disinherits him, and I can propose to him to buy this will for a million; it is worth that. Let us look into the objections to this course. Well, he may refuse the bargain; and as he is already trying to obtain possession, and *will* obtain it some day, I shall be obliged to turn to the other heir. Now, in my position, any false step may have serious consequences. Suppose Trimoulac accepts? I may be a dupe. At this moment he is no doubt penniless. It would be impossible to say to him: 'Pay me at once.' And once the will is destroyed he might dismiss me. And that is all the more likely, as, according to Madame Capitaine, this nephew of the colonel is a bad fellow. Besides, in order to deliver the will to him, it would be necessary—I did not think of that before—to suppress Zenobia; yes suppress her, neither more nor less, for she is not a woman to allow her dear Lucien to be despoiled without making an outcry. And so, I should expose myself to the galleys if I destroyed the will, and to the guillotine if I destroyed the woman. No, no, I prefer to renounce the million rather than that. Besides, I hate harsh measures, and it is my principle never to resort to them if I can manage otherwise. Come, come, this is all that there is to be said on that point, and all negotiations with Trimoulac are impracticable. However, let me see if it would be easier to deal with the lieutenant. In the first place, so far as I could tell at the café, he is a very frank fellow, without any malice. I should not have any cause to fear his abusing my confidence; and I am sure that if he promised me a million, he would give it to me, even after he got the will. For that matter, there is nothing to hinder me from making him sign a regular promise. The law does not forbid one fixing a price for enriching people. Besides, with him it would be easy enough to come to an understanding. He is not the heir-at-law, and he does not count upon obtaining possession, and will take care not to refuse my offer. The suttler woman could then make no objections. Instead of exposing myself to prosecution for keeping back a will, I should be thanked by that worthy woman, who would feel greatly obliged to me for finding her Lucien for her; and I should not be tempted to wring her neck, as under the first-named circumstances."

"Yes, yes," added Saint-Privat, growing more and more excited, "a man should always be straightforward, that is, when he can without wronging himself; and it is better to win a fortune by carrying out the colonel's wishes, than to run the risk of dealing with a rascal who would not pay me. It is settled," concluded the worthy old man, "I will come to an understanding with Lieutenant Bellefond." And, rising abruptly, he began to pace up and down the dark room, in which he hoped never again to set foot.

"Besides," he muttered, "I should have less trouble in finding

him than his opponent, about whom I know nothing at all. I shall soon find out where the lieutenant lives, for he is bound to give his address to the commander of Paris; and in any case I know his face, as a lucky chance placed him in my way to-night. It would be better to avoid any official measures, which always leave traces behind them, and to try to meet him. But where? Oh, yes, at the Palais-Royal, where I met him before. I am sure that he goes there often, like all the other half-pay officers. If I do not see him in a day or two, it will be time enough to make inquiries, and meanwhile I shall have to attend to Zenobia. Still, if I meet him anywhere, I will accost him. He is not easily approached, that is true, and just now we parted in anger, but I will set about it so cleverly that when he knows my motive, he will prove as gentle as a lamb."

All at once Saint-Privat smote his forehead, exclaiming: "I hope that he will not manage to get himself arrested before I find him. The scamp whom he came near thrashing at the café is certainly a bully belonging to Louis XVIII.'s police. I never saw his stupid face before, but I never mistake such men, as I belong to the profession myself. If that fellow finds my lieutenant when the allies have entered Paris, he will have him put in prison, and that will upset my plans. I must make haste to settle it, I see." Satisfied, no doubt, with the cunning plans which he had formed, the honest old fellow smiled and muttered: "My affairs are decidedly in a good way, and and I am beginning to believe that my daughter will have a fine dowry."

Then, after putting Zenobia's letter in his pocket, he again seated himself in the arm-chair, and resumed his dishonest letter-opening. M. de Saint-Privat never neglected his "duty."

III.

AFTER sending the man who was partial to the milk-posset about his business, Lucien had returned home in a very bad humour. His altercation with the rascal at the café had enraged him, and the old man's chatter had not been calculated to soothe him. He was also greatly dissatisfied with himself, and did not fail to realise that he had made several foolish mistakes. The greatest of all was certainly the quarrel with a police-spy, and perhaps with two of the species; and that, moreover, at the very moment when he had intended to get out of all political scrapes and turn to a quiet life by marrying a charming girl. However, Lucien was not a man to mourn over anything for long, and his nature, which always urged him on, bade him turn to the future rather than to the past. He did not give way to vain regrets, but thought only of the interview which he hoped to have with M. Vernède on the morrow.

One circumstance somewhat encouraged him as to the result of his outburst, and this was the fact that he had not been followed on leaving the Palais-Royal. He had turned several times to watch, and had even stopped at the corners of the streets, in order to throw any one who might be behind him off the track. But neither in the Rue de Valois, nor in the Cour des Fontaines, nor even in the Rue des Bons-Enfants, where he lived, had he seen any suspicious face, and he thought it certain that he had evaded pursuit. He therefore slept peacefully, and only dreamed for a brief space of the horrible scene at the quarry, the walling-up of a human being, the Grand Master, and the brethren. These mournful visions soon made room for brighter pictures, and Thérèse Vernède's lovely face appeared to him more than once.

On awaking, he had almost forgotten the dramatic events of that Sunday, which was destined to be a fateful day in his life, and he felt buoyant with hope. He rose early, dressed carefully, like a man ought to do when he is going to make a proposal of marriage, and went to breakfast at a café in the Rue Saint Thomas-du-Louvre, in order to be near M. Vernède's house, and to avoid the Palais-Royal, where he might meet the detectives of the night before. He was this time able to read the papers at his ease, and found that the enemy was still advancing, that Paris could not hold out, and that a capitulation was looked for that day. This news, although he had foreseen it, made him gloomy, and when he turned towards the banker's house he was no longer so gay as before, and the success of his proposals seemed doubtful to him. He recalled

with no little anxiety that M. Vernède had been less cordial of late, and he asked himself whether he had chosen a good time to risk his proposal of marriage.

The nearer he came to the house the more he lingered, for he felt much the same agony, mingled with a desire to retreat, which a man experiences when he is going to borrow some money or to have a tooth extracted.

M. Vernède lived at the corner of the Rue des Bourdonnais, a ten minutes' walk at the utmost from the café where the lieutenant had breakfasted, and yet he had not been less than three-quarters of an hour on the road. However, when he found himself before the arched doorway which led to the court-yard of the house, he took courage and went in without hesitation, much as a soldier does when he finds himself at the foot of a redoubt, and makes up his mind to scale the wall rather than retreat under the enemy's fire.

M. Vernède occupied the whole house, which was an old building, dating from the time of Louis XIV., when it had, no doubt, been erected by some wealthy cloth merchant; however, it was quite unlike the abodes of any of the rich financiers of our day. In the first place, M. Vernède did not look upon banking in the same way as modern capitalists do, who only count by millions, and never trouble themselves excepting about government loans or great limited liability companies. Thomas Vernède, faithful to old customs, had a business which consisted in discounting good commercial paper, and he had a horror of risky speculation. He was prudent and honourable, and satisfied with small profits. The great speculators of the time cared but little for their unassuming comrade, whose name, indeed, they scarcely knew; however, he was highly esteemed in the neighbourhood of his abode. He was respected for his frankness, his prompt way of dealing, his moderate charges, quiet habits, and simple life. These good people felt at their ease with this unassuming banker, who did not keep horses and equipages with footmen in livery, but who received them in an office which would not now-a-days be thought good enough for a broker's clerk.

Everything was in harmony with Vernède's house. On the ground floor were the offices, provided with deal tables and straw-bottomed chairs; and the safe, an old iron coffer that would make the Griffiths and the Chubbs of the present day fairly grin. This safe was protected by simple bars of white wood, and the walls of the room where the banker worked were covered with paper at half a franc a roll. On the first floor were the private rooms, which were very plain, and which only his most intimate friends ever entered. On the second floor were his daughter's apartments, which were furnished more elegantly, but not more expensively. The only servants were an office attendant, who also waited upon the banker, an old nurse who attended the young lady, and a cook, who had no pretensions to be classed A1 in her calling. In fact, there was no

display whatever about the place ; although M. Vernède was said to possess a very large fortune.

No one blamed him for scorning show, no one was even surprised by his extreme plainness ; for in France a man is easily excused for not eclipsing his neighbours when he is able to do so, and the appearance of poverty is only an evil when persons are really poor. It was known, too, that the banker was a Spartan in his tastes as well as in his opinions. He was believed to be partial both to homely cabbage-soup and to republican institutions, and this reputation did not injure him in the estimation of the laborious patriotic population of the district.

Lucien crossed the court-yard, not without looking up to a certain window filled with flowers, and he had the pleasure of catching a glimpse of the charming face of Mademoiselle Thérèse between two rose-bushes. She blushed at sight of him, smiled, and then vanished. This pleasant sight gave him more courage. To see it again he would have braved the fire of a battery, and so he was not afraid to venture before the father who had, he thought, no disinclination to see him. Twelve o'clock had just struck. It was the hour at which the banker returned to his office after hastily partaking of his plain breakfast. Lucien, sure of finding him there, and accustomed to being received at all hours, turned the door-knob without knocking, and went in. M. Vernède was, indeed, within, leaning with his elbows upon his desk, and so deep in thought that he did not hear the young man's footsteps. This was not his usual way ; and Lucien, who always found him looking over his accounts or signing papers, was greatly surprised to see him thus thoughtful and motionless, with his head on his hands, and his eyes half-closed.

He coughed by way of announcing his arrival, whereupon M. Vernède started like a man suddenly awakened, and quickly turned his head. "Is it you, my dear Bellefond?" said he, in a trembling voice. And, at the same time, he endeavoured to conceal a brace of pistols which lay among the papers on his desk ; then, changing his mind, and as though regretting this hasty impulse, he put them into an open drawer, which he did not take the trouble to close.

"Yes, sir, it is I," said Lucien, put out of countenance by this unexpected incident at the outset of his important visit. He had made up his mind as to how he would begin, and how the banker would receive him ; he had arranged a few phrases beforehand, and expected certain answers. In a word, he had settled the whole matter. But he had not for a moment supposed that he would find Monsieur Vernède reflecting with a brace of pistols beside him.

"I expected you, my friend," resumed the banker, who had recovered his composure.

"Indeed !" replied the lieutenant, whom this opening encouraged. "What made you think that I would come here to-day ? Have you guessed what I come for !"

"I believe so," said M. Vernède, quietly.

"Then you know that I love your daughter, and have come to ask for her hand?" resumed Lucien, with emotion, and feeling quite unable to delay his proposal.

"I know that you love her and that she does not dislike you, and I had a presentiment that you would come to-day to make a proposal, which I have been expecting for some time."

"May I hope, then, that you will not reject it; that you will think me worthy of Mademoiselle Thérèse, and fulfil my dearest wishes by granting me her hand?" exclaimed the officer, joyfully.

"Do not hope anything, my dear Bellefond," replied the banker, sadly. "I have great respect and regard for you. I am sure that you would make my daughter happy, and under any other circumstances I should wish for no son-in-law but you; however, this marriage cannot be thought of. I am a ruined man."

"Ruined! you are ruined? What does that matter to me? Do you suppose that I want your daughter for her dowry? You cannot know my feelings."

"I do not doubt your disinterestedness, my dear Bellefond. If I had ever doubted it I should not have encouraged or even tolerated your attentions to Thérèse, for I look upon marriage as a holy thing, and I despise those who make it a subject for speculation. But, I repeat it, I am completely ruined, and my daughter cannot be your wife."

"Why not? Because I have some money left of my own? Do you not understand, sir, that my dearest wish is to offer it to Mademoiselle Thérèse, and to you, and that you will make me very happy by sharing what I possess? Ah! sir, I am almost tempted to rejoice at the misfortune that has befallen you, since it enables me to show you that I love your daughter for herself. If you only knew how I had to struggle with myself before I could make up my mind to propose to her, believing her to be rich! I only delayed because I feared that I might be suspected of speculating upon this marriage, which I have hoped for unceasingly for a year past. Now, at all events, I am sure that nobody will fail to understand my motives; and I beg of you, sir, to allow me to marry your daughter, whom I worship, and whom I swear to make happy."

M. Vernède said nothing, but the lieutenant thought that he saw some emotion in his face. "Speak, sir," he added, eagerly; "I beg of you to reply to me, and pray do not drive me to despair by a refusal."

"Listen to me, Lucien," replied the banker, in a grave but affectionate tone, "and do not curse me if I persist in a resolution which I have not taken, believe me, without great suffering; for I may confess to you that my refusal will sorely afflict Thérèse, who loves you."

Lucien started. These words filled him with delight, and he was about to insist.

"Do not interrupt me, my friend," resumed M. Vernède; "you can judge of my reasons when I have told them to you; and in order to do so, I must speak of myself, for my career is not known to you. When my old friend Machefer introduced you to me, a year ago, you took me for a banker who had grown rich by his own toil, it is true, but who belonged by birth to the well-to-do middle classes. Machefer himself believes so, for he has only known me for fifteen years, and I had then already begun to be rich, and never spoke of my origin. I do not belong to the middle classes, however—I belong to the people."

The lieutenant made a gesture, as if to say that the banker's birth was a matter of indifference to him, and the latter went on: "My father, before the Revolution, was a lighterman at the Port Saint-Nicholas, and my mother sold apples in the streets. They were unable to send me to school, and I did not know how to read when I was twelve years old. I began by being a shoe-black, and in 1789 I became the clerk of a farmer-general of the revenues, who gave me just enough to keep my parents in a poor way without dying of hunger myself. My father was killed that year by a soldier of the Royal-Allemand regiment, who was charging the crowd on a bridge; and my mother was thrown down and trodden under foot, while a kick from a horse split her skull open. From that hour I have hated all aristocrats and all foreigners."

"I share that hatred," replied Lucien, warmly.

"I know that, my dear Bellefond, and it is because I know it that I have received you at my house, and countenanced your attentions," resumed the banker. "But let me continue. The Revolution improved my position. The abolition of privileged corporations enabled me to begin a business that progressed rapidly. It made me what I am. In 'Thermidor' of the year IV. of the Republic, I married a poor and virtuous young girl who had only her needle as a means of support. I should never have married her had she been rich or even at her ease. I have very decided ideas on that subject. Eighteen months afterwards I was a widower, and the father of Thérèse. My wife died when my daughter was born. After the 18th Brumaire, which brought Bonaparte into supreme power, I began bill discounting, and ten years later I had already amassed a comfortable independence. In 1814 I possessed two millions, and I had a right to believe that I might marry my daughter according to her own feelings, and at the same time according to my own principles."

Lucien involuntarily shrugged his shoulders. He did not understand why politics and sentiment should be mixed together in this way.

"Yes, indeed," continued M. Vernède, calmly, "I wished that she should marry a husband of her own choice, and one whom I should like, and I did not believe that I should fail to find such a man, for Thérèse and I think alike as regards marriage. Thérèse has my

blood in her veins, and understands equality in marriage as well as in politics."

"Equality in marriage is loving one another alike," exclaimed the young officer, "and I hope—I did hope, at least—that Mademoiselle Vernède——"

"Thérèse would not admit, any more than I do, that a woman should owe her fortune to her husband."

"You admitted that a husband might owe his fortune to his wife, since you did not repel me when you were rich."

"Let me finish, I beg of you. The question is not one of absolute equality of means. That is only to be found in poverty. When I thought of giving my daughter to you in marriage I was richer than you were, it is true, but you had a fortune which I intended making equal to my own. I wished to make you my partner before making you my son-in-law."

"What will prevent you from doing so now? Why not now agree to what you meant to do then?"

"Because I should act wrongfully if I did so. I am ruined, I tell you. I should drag you down with me, and you would not save me."

"Well, then, so much the better! There would then be equality in poverty; which you said just now was real equality. Take me for your partner, I beg of you; take all I possess. My money is yours; you would have accepted it six months ago; do so now. Put it into your business; whether it goes, or whether it improves things, I shall still be the happiest of men, as, rich or poor, I shall be able to aspire to Mademoiselle Vernède's hand."

This was said with such youthful earnestness, and so warmly, that the inflexible banker was touched, and showed it.

"And you will have good luck surely if you agree to this," resumed Lucien, eager to take advantage of the feeling which he had awakened.

"No," murmured M. Vernède, "the evil is without remedy. It is too late."

"You exaggerate the danger. Your business cannot have passed so suddenly from prosperity to danger."

"Who told you so?"

"I have guessed it, or rather—excuse me, sir, and do not accuse me of attempting to guess your secrets—I have read it on your face. I might tell you of the very day when I began to see that you were worried. Ah! it was not mere idle curiosity that prompted me to watch your anxious face. I was only thinking of my love, and I watched you as one watches a judge who is about to speak words of life or death, for my life depends upon my marriage with Mademoiselle Vernède."

The banker turned pale, and his eyes filled with tears. He felt that in this generous struggle he had indeed been conquered. "Thanks, my friend," said he, holding out his hand to Lucien, who pressed it

warmly. "After what you have said, I cannot hide anything from you, and, indeed, after your generous offer, it would be wrong for me to conceal the cause of my ruin. I will therefore tell you all, if only to show you how impossible it is for me to rise from the depths into which I have fallen. You cannot save me from failure, but you have saved me from despair."

Lucien understood these words. The pistols were there before his eyes in the open drawer, and he had glanced stealthily at them more than once, since M. Vernède had begun to speak, opining that the unfortunate banker had meditated making use of them to save himself from dishonour. Besides, these pistols were no common weapons; the barrels were handsome, damaskened, and had attracted Lucien's eyes, rousing a feeling such as we experience when we see any object or individual that we think we recognise. However, he drove away this fantastic fancy, and thought only of the danger threatening Thérèse's father. "Promise me," said he, pointing to the weapons, "that you will not yield to a fearful temptation, and forget that you are a father."

The banker flushed, and quickly closing the drawer, he turned the key.

"I shall not forget either that I possess a friend," he replied. And then, endeavouring to get calm, he resumed: "It was the return of Bonaparte from Elba that brought disaster upon me. His absurd undertaking shook credit everywhere in France; and since the 20th of March, I have had to suffer from failure after failure, so that two-thirds of my fortune have gone. I have, until now, however, been able to meet all my engagements, and with the capital that remains to me I should be almost certain of raising myself again, but it does not belong to me. I received it as a deposit, with permission to turn it to account until it was reclaimed. That time has come, or, at all events, it is at hand."

"So that, if you could return this money without touching what you have in your safe, you could keep up the business?"

"Yes."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lucien, eagerly. "I was sure that I should save you!"

"What do you mean, my dear Bellefond?" inquired the banker, with agitation.

"I mean that you have no right to reject the proposal which I am about to make. You owe a sum which may soon be demanded of you, and you cannot return it without ruining your bank; but, if you could borrow it, the danger would pass by, and once the crisis over, there would be nothing to prevent you from continuing your banking operations."

"True. But there is no one to lend me the amount."

"Why not?"

"Because no one lends money to a man whose solvability is already considered doubtful. There are moments, too, when the

mere fact of borrowing is fatal. By attempting to find the amount I need, I should only hasten the catastrophe."

"What if, by chance, some one offered you the amount?"

"I should accept it; but that is an absurd idea!"

"Not at all. I know some one who is quite willing to do so."

"I guess who it is, my friend. It is yourself, of course?"

"Yes, Monsieur Vernède, and I hope that you will not offend me by refusing me the pleasure of obliging you, for it would be offensive to do so, after what you have told me. You admit that you would accept this sum from an outsider, so you have no right to refuse it from a man whom you treat as a friend, and who hopes to enter your family. Beside, I will put you at your ease. I am not going to lend you this money; I merely place it in your business, and become your partner. We will work together, and rise again, I am sure."

The banker did not reply. He looked at Lucien, and his feelings were written on his face. The naturally stern and even somewhat harsh expression of his countenance softened, and his anxious brow cleared, while his lips parted, to reply to the generous offer of the lieutenant. There seemed to be a complete relaxation of the stiffness of attitude and manner which his misfortunes had caused him to assume. This self-made man was a strange one. He was naturally as upright and honest as can well be imagined; firm in his principles, obstinate in his opinions, he was a man who had risen to wealth by steady labour and probity; who had conquered a position by strength of will and without departing from the path of honour. Fortune had not changed him, nor had misfortune. Although the son of an apple-seller when he became a millionaire, he had not trifled with any one, nor with his own conscience. Had the word "irreconcilable" been made use of in those days as regards politics, it would have described this iron-nerved man, who, throughout forty years of a painful and troubled life, had never changed either in his views of social duty or his political opinions.

This was revealed by his regular and clearly defined features; by his eyes, in which his repressed but ardent feelings shone; and even by his firm gait, and the way in which he carried his head uprightly upon his broad shoulders. The petty banker of the district of the markets, the enriched shoeblack, looked like a Roman, a citizen of old republican Rome. Even a glance at him, as he sat before the mean-looking desk, covered with papers, in front of the drawer in which he had quietly locked up the pistols which he, perhaps, still kept to blow out his brains with, satisfied one that there was the stuff of a general, a statesman, or a conspirator in him. And yet he was agitated, although he tried to remain calm and cold. Lucien had, indeed, found the way to his hardened heart; for, after a silence more eloquent than any words, Thomas Vernède held out his arms to him, and said, pressing him to his heart: "I yield; we will struggle on together, and share our good or evil fortune."

"Thanks!" exclaimed the lieutenant, wild with delight; "thanks

for treating me as though I were already your son. From this day forth I am your partner, and I venture to hope——”

“My friend,” interrupted Thérèse’s father, “you did not allow me to finish the explanations which I was making as to my worries, and it is indispensable that you should know my situation thoroughly. It is perhaps less desperate than I considered it at first, for I have some little time before me to ward off the threatening danger. There is a point, however, which I must clear up before going further; it is whether the sum which I shall need very soon is not larger than you can dispose of.”

Lucien reddened, and did not reply. He had not thought of this very essential point.

“The money of which I speak, and which I am so anxious about, was lodged with me on the 11th of September, 1814, for one year. We are now at the 3rd of July. It is therefore payable within seventy days.”

“That is a longer time than I shall require to turn my means into money, and I will at once——”

“Pray allow me, my dear Bellefond, to finish what I have to say. I told you that this money was not placed here merely to be returned, but at five per cent. interest. I therefore owe one year of interest besides the principal.”

The officer made a gesture of indifference. A few thousand francs more or less did not trouble him.

“It was deposited here by a man,” resumed Monsieur Vernède, “whose debtor I would, under any other circumstances, have refused to become; but I found myself embarrassed for the moment, and the amount enabled me to go on. This man is one of our political foes, a nobleman, an *émigré* who returned with the Russian army, in which he had obtained the rank of captain by fighting against his own country.”

“Yes; one of those traitors whom I found so much pleasure in cuffing when I met them in the streets of Paris,—one of the cowards who made off for Ghent on the 20th of March.”

“I do not think that he was a coward, for I heard that he went to join the Duke of Angoulême in the south, and was wounded at the head of a company of royal volunteers; however, he had betrayed France by serving the allies, and that is enough to make me hate him. His name is Baffey. He is the Marquis de Baffey, and after the peace he returned to the king’s household, in which positions had been left for all who had held them before. He is a lieutenant in the Black Musketeers.”

“That is a fine corps, indeed! If ever I come across him, he had better behave himself.”

“You will certainly meet him, my friend, especially if you become my partner; for he will not fail to come to Paris with his friends, the foreigners, and I have no doubt but that one of his first visits will be for me.”

"Let me receive him, and he'll never return."

"Oh, no, my dear Bellefond! As long as I am in his debt, he must be sacred to both of us."

"Yes; but when he is paid——"

"Then we shall see. But to finish, and to tell you all. I must inform you that Monsieur Baffey had an aim in placing his money with me."

"Yes; he must have had one. He would not otherwise have chosen you for a banker, for your anti-royalist opinions are well known."

"I know now, but too late, what his purpose was—he wished to marry my daughter."

Lucien sprang from his chair as though struck by a bullet. "That is impossible!" exclaimed he. "What, he! an *émigré*, a nobleman. Where did he ever see her?"

"You mean to say that his caste prejudices should prevent him from courting the daughter of a plebeian. I should believe it, as you do, but I have had proof of the contrary. This man saw Thérèse at mass at Saint-Eustache, and fell madly in love with her. I have no doubt but that if we were living in the days when his ancestors were above the law, he would have had my daughter carried off to some ignoble retreat; but France has not yet relapsed into the old system, and the marquis entertained so violent a passion for Thérèse, that he made up his mind to set aside all prejudices, and ask for her hand in marriage."

"Did you reject his suit?"

"Can you ask? Do you believe me capable of wishing to connect myself with a nobleman? I refused, and in such terms that I hoped to be free from the man for ever. I should have been glad to throw the money he had placed with me in his face, for, when I accepted the deposit, I had not known his intentions. Unfortunately, when he revealed them, my troubles had already begun."

"How did he act after this refusal?"

"Like a marquis, like a courtier, as he is. It is all very well for insignificant people like ourselves to evince regret and let our feelings be seen," said the banker, bitterly. "Yes, Monsieur de Baffey has the cold, polished manners of a nobleman. He contented himself with politely expressing his regret, and insinuated that, if I chose, the money in my hands would be looked upon by him as part of the sum he would settle upon my daughter by the marriage contract; he even ventured to say that my refusal need not put an end to a connection which he wished to keep up."

"And you continued to receive him? You allowed him to become acquainted with Mademoiselle Vernède?"

"He never saw her, except at church, and that I could not prevent. As for my reception of him, it was always the same. I received him in this office, where I transact my business. Besides, he only declared himself at the beginning of last march; on the

morrow came the landing of Bonaparte at Cannes, and on the day after that the marquis had gone to fight the usurper."

"But he will return more insolent than ever, and perhaps more pressing now that the Bourbons are to be restored again."

"I expect it, as I have already told you; and you now understand why I wish to pay the sum which this man lent me as soon as it is due."

"It must be done—it must be done at any sacrifice!"

"Yes, at any price; and if you cannot help me, my dear Bellefond, I would rather a thousand times submit to the disgrace of a failure than remain under obligations to Monsieur de Baffey. The amount is——"

"May I come in?" asked a soft voice at this moment, and a laughing countenance appeared at the door. Lucien flushed with delight, and M. Vernède quickly turned.

It was his daughter who had showed her fresh and charming countenance in the doorway at the end of the room—a doorway communicating with a staircase leading to the first floor. "Yes, I am coming in," she added, laughing. "If you are busy, you can send me away; but not till I have given you a kiss." And the young girl ran to her father and covered his brow and cheeks with kisses. "There! Now I'm going!" she added, with another laugh.

Then, straightening herself up, and pretending to see the lieutenant for the first time—he, meantime, had been devouring her with his eyes—she exclaimed: "What! Monsieur Lucien! Oh! so you were there all the time!"

"Yes, mademoiselle; and I am very glad to be here," stammered her lover, who was delighted and yet disturbed.

"Well, I'm sorry that I came in like that. You will think that I act like a school-girl; and so I do."

"I, mademoiselle? Heaven forbid! Besides, I have no right to do so; I always think everything that you do must be right."

Lieutenant Bellefond, who never recoiled before the enemy, lost all his presence of mind when he found himself face to face with Mademoiselle Vernède; and it was necessary for the banker to come to the rescue to keep him from making himself ridiculous.

"Thérèse," said M. Vernède, trying to suppress his daughter's gaiety with the stern look which her caresses always banished, "I forbade you to come here."

"Well, father, you always let me kiss you six times a day, and this is only the fourth." And she began to count upon her fingers. "Once this morning, in your own room; once when you went to the safe; once when you sat down to breakfast, and once——"

"This is trifling enough, my dear child——"

"Don't interrupt me, or I shall begin again."

"I beg of you to leave us. I am having a serious conversation with Monsieur Bellefond."

It was now Thérèse's turn to lose countenance. She read her

father's face as though it had been some cherished volume which she knew by heart, and she guessed that the topic now being discussed was her marriage with Lucien, whom she loved. She blushed up to her ears, hung her head, and leant over M. Vernède's chair, so as to hide her embarrassment. She was very lovely thus, with her light hair hanging loosely; her rosy cheeks and her red lips; and her girlish figure displayed to advantage in her clinging white drapery. A poet of that day, when mythological costumes were still the fashion, would have compared her to one of the three Graces, or, at all events, to a nymph. However, the young officer was no poet, and he contented himself with gazing lovingly and smilingly at her youthful beauty.

Meanwhile, M. Vernède frowned; he wished to put an end to a conversation that was out of place at that moment, and he was again about to renew his request when there came a gentle knock at the door of the outer office.

It opened almost immediately, and a gentleman entered. The banker rose up and went towards his visitor, whom he recognised at once, but had not expected so soon.

Lucien, who had never seen him before, at once guessed who he was. Jealousy is not always blind, and hatred is always clear-sighted. As for Thérèse, she turned very pale, and looked another way.

The gentleman whose appearance produced this change was tall and prepossessing, with an easy bearing. His attire was elegant. He did not look more than thirty, and although his face was not particularly expressive, his appearance was that of a thorough gentleman; indeed, his good birth and aristocratic training were written upon his cold, regular features, and the graceful ease with which he presented himself showed that he belonged to good society. This was, in fact, the Marquis Henri de Baffey, who thus unexpectedly appeared in M. Vernède's office at a time when it might be supposed that he was still in Flanders with King Louis XVIII.

"Is it you, sir?" said the banker, in a tone that was anything but cordial.

"I am aware, sir, that you did not expect me, and I beg of you to excuse me for not asking a servant to announce me," replied the Marquis de Baffey, in a courteous tone. "I reached Paris this morning. His Majesty deigned to appoint me to assist the commissioners of the allied powers, who have come to treat about the capitulation, and I made haste to profit by this chance of seeing you. Before the unfortunate events which obliged me to go away for a time, I had some intercourse with you, sir, which I have not forgotten, and I wished to renew it as soon as possible."

While speaking, the marquis looked at Mademoiselle Vernède with evident meaning, though very respectfully.

Lucien clenched his fists, and shut his teeth, as if grinding them.

"Leave us, daughter!" said the banker.

Thérèse did not wait to be told twice ; she hastened away without looking at the Marquis de Baffey, but she glanced at Lucien as if to say : " I love you ; and if you love me, you must not fight with that man."

Young girls' eyes say all that they wish to say, and the language of flowers resorted to in the East is much less clear and expressive than the eyes of a girl of our Western climes.

" I now regret my haste, sir," added the marquis, more coldly ; " and I see that the moment of my visit was ill chosen, as I have caused Mademoiselle Vernède to leave so quickly."

" My daughter is not and should not be mixed up in my affairs," hastily replied M. Vernède ; " and as I suppose, sir, that you have come to see me on business, I——"

" Such was not my intention, sir," replied M. de Baffey, very haughtily ; " but your manner of receiving me shows that I was wrong in supposing that we might meet on other grounds."

" You can speak before this gentleman ; he is my partner."

" Ah !" said the marquis, giving Lucien a look which was far from pleasant, and which was returned with interest. " I did not know that."

" Have you any objection to it ?" asked the lieutenant, with the evident intention of quarreling.

" None whatever, sir," replied the captain of the Black Musketeers ; " still I would remark that I am acquainted with Monsieur Vernède only, and that I spoke to him."

The eyes of the two young men met, flashing like blades of steel, and although neither was in uniform, they represented to perfection, in their chance antagonism, the new and the old army, between which the hatred was so great. Lucien Bellefond, with his abrupt gestures, his aggressive airs, and his bold and fiery manner, represented the old army—that which, in 1792, had started off in wooden clogs to conquer Europe, and which had just ended its career, proud rather than humiliated by the recent defeats, but irritated at being haughtily treated by those untried men who had come, as the saying then ran, " in the baggage waggons of the foreigners." Henri de Baffey, on the other hand, was the new army—that which the Bourbons were seeking to " reform" by appointing noblemen for officers, and he belonged to the " king's household," the mere mention of which recalled the old system. This was obvious in his cold and haughty speech, his stiffness, and disdainfulness. Both were certainly brave, but not in the same way ; and both were anxious to fight, for they not only knew themselves to be political enemies, but understood that they were rivals in love. Lucien had learned this from Thomas Vernède, and the marquis had guessed it.

" Well, sir," now said the banker, to put an end to the mute scene that might end in an open quarrel, " the sum which you deposited with me a year ago will be given back to you on the 11th September, before noon. Your visit was no doubt to remind me of

that date ; but I remember it, and I think it idle to continue this conversation."

"Very well, sir, I will leave," replied the marquis, dryly, for he was wounded to the quick. "On the 11th of September I will send my agent to receive the money." And then, turning upon his heels, with the nonchalance of a nobleman of the old court, M. de Baffey went out without bowing.

"Insolent fellow !" exclaimed Lucien, who had a great mind to run after him.

However, M. Vernède held him by the arm to restrain him, and said to him very quietly : "No imprudence, my friend ! This is not the time for it, for in a few days the Bourbon Government will be re-established, and we shall be obliged to keep very quiet, so as to escape the rigorous measures which will be adopted as regards all who are patriotic."

"What ! you wish me to refrain from thrashing the puppy when I encounter him again ?"

"I require you to refrain from it, at least, until I have paid him. I have just now sacrificed my ideas as to equality of wealth in matrimonial matters," added the banker, smiling ; "and you can well afford to restrain your rancour as regards this man for a couple of months or so."

"For two months !" growled Lucien ; "that is a long time, and if it could be shortened by paying him in advance——"

"I am sure that he would not consent ; and besides, it seems to me that it will be difficult for you to help me before that time. Do you know the amount that I—that we shall be obliged to pay him?"

The officer shook his head.

"Three hundred thousand francs, my dear Lucien, and with the interest, that will make three hundred and fifteen thousand."

Lucien Bellefond could not hide the agitation caused by the statement of this formidable amount. All that he possessed at that moment was sixty thousand francs in bank notes (the only cash remaining of the money left him by his father), and a farm in Périgord, which brought him in, on an average, about twelve hundred francs a year. And even supposing that he found means to sell this farm at once, and for cash, which was very unlikely under existing circumstances, money being so scarce, the result of the sale, coupled with his meagre capital, would scarcely place a hundred thousand francs at his disposal.

Now three hundred and fifteen thousand francs were necessary to save Thérèse's father, and rid himself of a hated rival. The poor lieutenant was a long way from attaining that result.

Thomas Vernède saw that he looked perplexed, and easily guessed the reason why.

"My dear Bellefond," said he, "I ought to have begun where I have ended. I should have spared you a painful disappointment. Forgive me, for I ought to have guessed that your small fortune

could not overcome this difficulty. Believe me that I am not the less obliged to you for your offer."

"You accepted it," said Lucien eagerly.

"Yes, when I did not know what your resources were. Now that I do, I should be dishonest if I took your money. I could not get out of the difficulty in which I am involved, and I should merely drag you down with me."

"You are wrong," I tell you, and if you will allow me to——"

"Do not insist, my friend; you pain me. I was resigned before I saw you; I am still so. Besides, I shall fall without being dishonoured, as I shall pay this man when his money is due. When that is done, nothing will remain to me, it is true; but I shall still be able to hold up my head. Besides, poverty does not frighten me, and Thérèse is like me in that. I shall be able to find a clerkship with my old friend Machefer, and Thérèse must give music lessons if necessary."

This was too much, and Lucien was not able to bear this last blow. The idea of seeing Mademoiselle Vernède obliged to give lessons for a livelihood, and exposed to the advances of the odious Black Musketeer, was so painful to him that he could not refrain from dissembling. "In the name of everything that is dear to you, sir, let me speak!" he exclaimed. "I did not tell you that I could not let you have this money."

"No; but I saw it from your embarrassment."

"I was not embarrassed, I was surprised. I did not expect to hear that the amount was so large, and I have only a part of it by me at the present moment. But I shall make it up by selling the property left me by my father, and as we have time before us——"

"Seventy days and no more," interrupted that ever-precise banker. "It is not enough, my dear Lucien, to enable you to turn any landed property into money. There is no one to buy land at such short notice, and you could not obtain cash payment for it if there were."

"A neighbour of mine is anxious to buy my land, and would be only too glad to pay for it at once."

This neighbour, of course, existed only in the lieutenant's imagination, but he had now started upon such statements, and kept on. Thomas Vernède said nothing, but looked at Lucien with such keenness that the imprudent officer became embarrassed. "You find an answer for everything," said the banker at last, "but it would not be proper for me to question you as to your fortune; and I must believe what you say; however, allow me to state that Machefer, who has known you for several years, told me that you had a modest competence, but were not rich."

"Machefer knows nothing about my affairs. I never told him anything about them, and as he never knew me till the campaign of 1813, he cannot know my position. I told him that I had an uncle by marriage, a very wealthy uncle, who had always promised to make me his heir."

"Colonel Lacaussade, you mean, who died; or rather disappeared, in Russia?"

"Yes. No one knows what became of him; but there is nothing to show that he is dead, and if he be alive——"

"There is nothing to show that he is not dead; and besides, you are not the heir-at-law."

"He may have made a will in my favour; but I need not tell you that I don't rely upon that to realise the three hundred thousand francs. My own means will suffice."

"So be it," replied the banker, after a pause. "I rely upon you, and I look upon you henceforth as my partner."

"Thanks, sir, thanks, for trusting me," stammered Lucien, who had not yet recovered his coolness.

"Now, my friend, this is what you will have to do. You must begin by sending in your resignation to the Minister of War."

"Oh, yes, I will do that willingly. I have not the least wish to serve the Bourbons," said Lucien.

"Then you must come here to work."

"You ask just what I wish. I should not have dared to ask this favour," exclaimed Lucien, delighted at the idea that he would be able to see Mademoiselle Vernède several times a day.

"It is no favour. You must learn the affairs of our firm," replied the banker, laying a stress upon the possessive pronoun. And as Lucien was about to express his thanks, he added: "Excuse me, my friend, for sending you away at present. It is the hour when the post comes in, and I need to be alone. We shall see one another soon; and besides, you have no time to lose about turning your landed property into money."

Lucien did not venture to reply, and he was about to go, although he was dying to speak further of a person whose name had not been mentioned as often as he would have wished since the Marquis de Baffey had left.

"Let me give you some advice before we part," resumed the banker. "Avoid all quarrels, not only with this nobleman, but with others like him. We shall both of us be pointed out as suspicious characters, and we must be extremely careful."

"I shall endeavour to be so, although I long to treat these returned emigrants as they deserve. They are mere sword-draggers, and come in at the heels of the foreigners," retorted Lucien.

"I despise and hate them as much as you do, my dear Bellefond, but it is not in a duel that these men are to be reached. A day will come, I hope, when we shall be able to proscribe them all as in the year II.; but in the meantime, and as long as they are the masters in our unfortunate country, it is not fitting that a patriot should risk his life against theirs. A dagger is the best weapon."

"A dagger!" exclaimed Lucien, greatly surprised by this vehement outburst.

"All means are good to those who fight for France," said M. Vernède.

The young officer started. It seemed to him that he had heard these bold words before, but he could not tell where. Suddenly his memory returned. It was the Grand Master who had spoken them in the quarry at Montmartre. The coincidence was singular; but after all it was not surprising, for the banker's views were as radical and uncompromising as those of the Masons. "If he knew that I belonged to a secret society!" thought Lucien. "I hope that Machefer won't tell him. However, since last night he looks upon me as freed from my vow."

"And now, good-bye, my friend," said the banker, giving his young partner his hand to take leave of him.

Lucien went off, and once in the street, he felt his head swim as though he had been intoxicated. He was, indeed, intoxicated with happiness, and well might he be so, as he had succeeded in overcoming M. Vernède's many objections, and might now hope to marry Thérèse. But his joy was not free from anxiety, for the imprudent lover had plunged into deep waters, and did not know how to swim to shore. How could he find three hundred and fifteen thousand francs in two months' time, when he possessed but a third of the amount?

He did not conceal from himself that if he failed he could not marry Thérèse. The rigid Vernède might have been touched had the lieutenant told him his exact situation, but he would certainly not forgive a falsehood.

"What's to be done?" said Lucien to himself as he went home. From whom could he borrow? "My man of business in Périgord," he thought, "could, perhaps, raise twenty thousand francs on a mortgage. But what good would that do? Ah! if my poor uncle had only made his will before he went to Russia to fight, I should be saved. But he did not do so, and here I am with my paltry fortune, and with three hundred thousand francs to raise! And I shall not succeed in finding the money. The marquis in a couple of months' time will ruin the father of Thérèse, or else propose to buy him off by letting him have his daughter. The only thing that remains for me to do is to blow my brains out."

And the poor officer smote his brow by way of brightening up his ideas. Suddenly a new thought occurred to him. "What a fool I am!" he exclaimed. "Isn't there the gaming table to furnish these three hundred thousand francs? I have not played for three months past. I must be in luck. I have sixty thousand francs by me; all I need is to make the amount five times as much." And Lucien added, with an air of determination: "Yes, I have made up my mind. I will begin the attack this very night, at No. 154, in the Palais-Royal."

IV.

A WEEK had elapsed since the Masons had condemned and executed the traitor in the Montmartre quarries. France was defeated, and her humiliation complete. The capitulation had been signed on Monday; on Wednesday the remnants of the French army had left Paris to retire to the Loire; on Thursday the allied troops reached the city gates; on Friday they passed along the boulevards and took possession—the English on the right and the Prussians on the left side; and finally, on Saturday, at four o'clock, King Louis XVIII. entered the capital. A portion of the inhabitants applauded the foreigners, and the conquerers might well suppose that they were looked upon as liberators. They did not trust to this, however, and Marshal Blücher thought fit to place cannon upon the bridges, quays, and public squares, so as to suppress any attempt at insurrection.

For the masses were far from friendly to the soldiers of the Holy Alliance, and it would be insulting to the Parisians of that day to believe that they all witnessed the arrival of the enemies with content, or patiently endured their insolent control. The people were hostile, and did not hesitate to appear so. In the suburbs especially the irritation was remarkable, and groups were constantly forming, who openly suggested revolt. Several French officers had remained in the city and kept up the agitation. They were to be seen going about in civilian attire, flourishing huge sticks, and with a frown on their faces and a savage look in their eyes. They were looking for a Prussian or an Englishman to quarrel with; a Prussian especially, for their hatred of Wellington's soldiers was less intense. Paris, whatever might be said in the papers, which spoke of the dancing in the gardens of the Tuileries to welcome the return of the lawful sovereign, was very sad. People sung "Long live Henri IV.," or "Give us back our father," under the balcony of the Pavillon de l'Horloge; but apart from that there was no merriment, and the Royalist songs failed to meet with success.

In the very heart of the great conquered capital, the Palais-Royal formed a kind of neutral zone, where the conquered and the conquerors met without attacking one another. Political and national hatred did not expire, of course, upon the threshold of the temple of gaiety; however, it was in a measure restrained there. Foreigners and French, partisans of the Bourbons and Bonaparte, all hurried with equal eagerness to the wooden galleries, to the cafés and gambling-houses, and contented themselves with looking askance at one

another, when they were close together, instead of coming to blows, as often happened in the streets where patriots met to hiss at the returned *émigrés*, whom they called the light infantry of Louis XIV. At the Palais-Royal a tacit peace was the rule. It is true that each party had its special corner, and mingled as little as possible with the adverse one. The Bonapartists went to the Café Montansier; the Royalists chose the Valois; and it would have fared badly with the imprudent wight who ventured to take his coffee in the enemy's camp. The foreign officers more particularly chose the tables in the gardens, where they swallowed no end of ices and sherbet before joining the crowd in the Tartars' camp, or strolling to the gaming-tables.

The invaders were eager to enjoy themselves, and were determined to turn their visit to account in that way. They did enjoy themselves; and it is asserted that they spent in Paris at this period a sum equivalent to the war contributions levied upon France. Gambling was their weakness, and they were not lucky, for during the entire period of the occupation the gaming-tables realised enormous profits. Marshal Blucher, on the very evening when he entered Paris, lost a hundred and fifty thousand francs at Frascati's tables. That is matter of history. During the first few days especially, the gambling-tables at the Palais-Royal were so greatly crowded that General Muffling, the foreign Governor of Paris, was obliged to place men at the doors to prevent people from crushing one another.

The crowd was greatly in the way of Lucien Bellefond, who for eight days past had been playing against the bank at Number 154. The daring officer had made up his mind to go on boldly with his mad effort to win the three hundred thousand francs he needed.

As he passed his days at M. Vernède's office, he could only play at night-time, that is to say at the hour when places at the *roulette* and *trente-et-quarante* tables were fought for, and it was difficult indeed to reach them. He came near quarreling several times with some of the foreigners who blocked the way, and his desire to try his fortune was great, indeed, to enable him to bear the unpleasant contact which he was forced to endure so patiently. However, he was ready to bear anything to win Thérèse, and these matters did not trouble him at all.

He went regularly to the Palais-Royal after dinner, proceeded to Number 154, played there till nine, then stopped and went home. Experience had shown him that luck never lasts, and that it is wise not to tarry. That is why he made it an unfailing rule never to linger, and he was none the worse for it. The first three evenings, it is true, had proved unlucky, and had cost him ten thousand francs, but he had won on the fourth. On the fifth he had cleared twenty-five thousand francs, and luck was still on his side, for after a week's play against the bank he had almost doubled his capital.

He had now more than a hundred thousand francs, one third of the amount necessary to save Thérèse's father and re-pay the Black Musketeer the money owing to him. Thus Lucien was in high spirits; he had never been so happy. Thomas Vernède treated him as though he were already his son-in-law, and Mademoiselle Vernède would come ten times a day into the office where the love-smitten officer was busy with ledgers, books, and accounts. The passion for play did not interfere with his love for that charming girl, for he now no longer played for mere excitement. Even at the gambling table he thought only of her. He considered himself near the winning post. Four or five evenings more, and the result would be attained. Apart from this his mind was entirely absorbed in his love and his hopes, so that he had almost forgotten the masons, and did not go to chat with his friend Machefer at breakfast-time as he had been wont to do.

On the Sunday after the "walling-up," Lucien had the pleasure for the first time of walking out with the banker and his daughter, and when he reached the Palais-Royal, after dining with them at a restaurant in the Champs Elysées, he felt as happy as though he had owned the universe itself. Thérèse, as usual, had been charming, and Thomas Vernède gayer and more confiding than ever before. It is true that the lieutenant had gone so far as to say that the sale of his property promised well, which was anything but true, for he could scarcely have received an answer from Périgord as yet. However, he thought himself so sure of success that he could not help boasting.

That day the galleries were even more crowded than usual, for the two other armies of the coalition were coming to Paris; the Emperor Alexander and Emperor Francis were expected on the following day, and some Russian and Austrian officers had already arrived. The Palais-Royal was full of foreign uniforms. Highlanders with kilts jostled Cossacks with loose trousers; white coats mingled with red, and all the tongues in Europe were spoken in the streets. Amid this cosmopolitan throng, men attired in long blue coats, and with the ribbon of the Legion of Honour in their button-holes, might be seen passing along silently but threateningly. They represented that ruined and conquered France which was still formidable, and the foreigners stood aside to let them pass, for they had learned to respect them upon the battle-field.

Lucien nodded to several old comrades, and then walked quickly to the gambling-house. He longed to begin playing once more, for he felt sure he would be lucky that night, as his day had been so happy in the company of his affianced bride. He was determined to play in such a way as to bring matters to a conclusion, and to raise his stakes so as to push matters with the bank if the sitting proved favourable. He had a hundred thousand francs about him, and did not think himself presumptuous in hoping to triple the amount. When he went in the game was going on briskly, and the bank was winning largely. The three hundred thousand francs which he

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wished to win were there before the croupiers, and had come out of the pockets of two English officers, who, in spite of their great losses, still continued to play as recklessly as before. Never had a better opportunity been offered for a French officer to win, and thus revenge himself for the defeat at Waterloo.

Lucien at once made up his mind to win the two foreigners' spare cash. They staked upon the black, so he put six thousand francs upon the red, and won. Luck was decidedly on his side. The croupiers knew Lucien, and were not accustomed to see him play so boldly, especially at the outset.

The success with which he had begun made a sensation, although the game had become a very high one. The winnings were paid with extreme courtesy and special promptitude. Indeed, Lucien thought that the croupiers seemed to be delighted that France was getting the better of England, so to speak. "A man may be a croupier and yet a patriot," thought he, in all simplicity.

The truth was that the croupiers were delighted at taking up twelve thousand francs on one side of the table, and having to pay out but six thousand on the other. Their seeming patriotism was only love of money.

Lucien left his entire winnings upon the table, and won again. He soon had eighteen thousand francs before him. "If I go on like this for twenty minutes longer," thought he, "I shan't need to return here again."

The twenty minutes did not go by without some losses; but on the whole the result was fortunate. At the end of the deal he had ninety thousand francs before him, lost by the Englishmen, who still persisted in preferring the black. The game was beginning to resemble a struggle between the two nations.

The Englishmen were no more alike than Wellington's soldiers were like Napoleon's. These two sons of Albion might, all the same, have passed for perfect specimens of the Anglo-Saxon race. One was tall and thin, with a high nose and a long chin; while the other was short and stout, with a round face as red as his coat. They both lost with perfect indifference. After each round, they put down their money without a word, or gesture, or any expression of discontent on their faces. They might as well have been *automata*. Lucien, on the contrary, was very nervous, and watched the game with a feverish eye. He seemed to be besieging fortune as though it had been a fortress. The other players had soon become interested in the duel, and were surveying it in preference to their own play, which was trifling, for the more formidable adversaries of the bank had not appeared that night.

As for the men employed by the bank, they were beginning to watch the lieutenant with some anxiety. It was evident that if he continued as he had begun, the Englishmen would go off completely cleared out, and that the Frenchman would break the bank. It was already known how he played; he had been known to go off

a loser, and without striving to conquer bad luck, thus making an effort of which few players are capable; and he had also been known to play on with marvellous boldness, and to stop short in the midst of good luck as well as of bad. He was looked upon as a dangerous man, who might some day make a great void in the cash-box, and that time seemed now to have come. He was always treated with special politeness. A seat was kept for him by the croupier when the crowd was not too great, and his skill was often praised in a low tone.

The bank had every interest in being courteous to those who won large sums, as according to all probability the money would come back to it within a certain limit of time. This is why the croupiers were so polite.

"Will he go on? Will he stay?"^a they thought to themselves, after another round, which had made him win sixty thousand francs more.

The Englishmen still held out, but it was easy to see that their supplies were being exhausted; they had placed a pile of bank-notes upon the table, which appeared to be all they had with them, for the tall thin man finally said to his companion: "It is the end." Lucien, who understood a little English, heard this remark, and felt no compassion for the misfortune of his enemies. His mind was full of his own delight, which was one that gamblers alone can understand, the delight of triumph being superior to that of winning money. It seemed to him that he had exterminated a monster, a hydra, a dragon guarding the treasure which he needed in order to win Thérèse. It is true that the dragon, although dangerously wounded, still had his claws left, and was able to defend himself.

While the cards were being shuffled anew the enamoured winner counted out his money, and found that forty thousand francs more would make up the required three hundred thousand. He thought for a moment of departing, as his luck had been too great to last much longer, and he feared he might exhaust it. However, the desire of ending matters withheld him, and he remained, mentally promising himself that this sitting should be the last. The croupiers, who can read the faces of the players around them, had guessed his hesitation, and, when they saw that he had made up his mind to remain, they gave one another a significant look.

The game began by two reds, and Lucien, who had remained faithful to that colour, and staked the *maximum*, won twenty-four thousand francs. The Englishmen, who persisted in betting on the black, lost again. It was their last shot. Great Britain was vanquished. They remained as unmoved, however, as Wellington had been three weeks before when the French cavalry charged the British lines. They saw their money disappear, drawn off by the croupier's rake, without even a frown, and rose with the utmost coolness, like brave soldiers who are forced to beat a retreat and retire in good order.

Lucien was looking up to enjoy the pleasant spectacle of their defeat, when behind them he saw a new-comer, who was making ready to take their place. He was a Prussian officer of high rank in mufti. His breast was covered with decorations, his left arm was in a sling, and his right eye was covered with a black bandage. To all appearance, he must have been wounded at the recent battle of Ligny. His face was a strange one; his cheek-bones were high, his forehead low, his jaw heavy, while his mouth extended from ear to ear. Heavy moustaches met his gray side-whiskers; his shoulders were broad and square, and his neck like that of a bull. His only available hand was of herculean size.

He came hastily towards the table, as though making a bayonet charge, and it seemed to Lucien that his only visible eye darted fire. The conquering lieutenant was annoyed by the sight of this officer, he knew not why. He was perhaps thinking of Waterloo. A Prussian coming up when the English were retreating was like Blucher appearing on the night of the Eighteenth of June, when Wellington's position was so critical. Lucien, like Napoleon, at first thought of giving up the struggle, but like him he soon resolved to fight the new enemy. He had now nearly attained his object. Let him but win twice more and the three hundred thousand francs would be his. The game seemed too promising to be abandoned.

The Prussian seated himself, and laid down five or six rolls of gold. The two Englishmen had nodded to him, and placed themselves behind him. They evidently wished to look on at the battle fought by their ally, and hoped that he would win. Then the German began with the prudence peculiar to his race.

He staked a thousand francs upon the red. This choice annoyed Lucien, who wished to keep on the same side as before, but did not care to play on the same colour as the enemy of France. He was no longer satisfied with winning; he wanted Prussia to suffer as England had done. Thus he passed over to the black.

This was unlucky, for the black lost, and as he always played the maximum, twelve of his thousand-franc notes returned to the bank. The croupiers smiled affably as they paid the Prussian. Lucien shrugged his shoulders, and staked the same amount as before.

This slight check did not discourage him or make him change countenance, and yet he felt it bitterly. It was like an omen. It seemed as though fortune were warning him to retire. The sinister countenance of the man who had escaped the carnage at Ligny made a strange impression upon him, moreover. It seemed to him that this officer was his evil genius, and that he must get up and box his ears.

However, the cards were being laid down once more, and black lost again. The twenty-four thousand francs won at the two first rounds had gone.

"The devil take it!" muttered Lucien; "this Prussian brings

me ill-luck ! But we shall see ! We are not at Mont-Saint-Jean, where we had two to one against us."

Whenever the great battle came into any one's head in those days, the conquerors called it "Waterloo," and the conquered called it "Mont-Saint-Jean."

Lucien now lost five times running. The most unexpected and vexing losses followed one after another. The black, upon which he still staked, brought thirty-two when the red had thirty-one ; or forty when the red had thirty-nine. It was enough to exasperate even a cooler man than Lucien. He had seen ninety thousand francs melt away since the German officer had sat down. This was enough to make him dislike the ugly warrior.

He looked at him furiously, and had a great inclination to rise and go away, and return only when the ill-omened fellow had left. Suddenly it came into his head that the only way to evade the fatal influence of the Prussian would be to follow his play, and so he laid a pile of notes upon the red. Thereupon the fatal being raised his head, fixed his piercing eye upon him, and placed his own pile upon the black. This was a declaration of war, and as much as to say that he did not wish to play on the same side as a Frenchman. This time, to complete Lucien's exasperation, the black won.

He returned to it the next time, but the German started on the red, and the lieutenant lost. This time he became angry, and said to his adversary across the table : "Are you making game of me, sir ?"

The Prussian looked at him, but did not reply.

"You are an impudent fellow, and I'll cut your ears off presently !"

However, the Prussian remained silent and unmoved.

"The brute does not appear to understand French," said the officer to those about him.

No one assented, for those who were near at hand were all old players, who would not have stirred for a thunderbolt, and who did not understand why a man should think of anything but going on with the game. "You are wrong," said the croupier to Lucien, in a low tone, "he has a perfect right to change his colour as long as the first card is not down."

"I did not ask your opinion," growled Lucien.

"Make your game, gentlemen," called out the croupier, in the nasal tone habitual to men of his calling.

The incident just recorded had interrupted the game, and the Prussian had profited by this suspension of hostilities to say a few words to the Englishmen who stood behind him. Lucien, who could not speak German, did not understand what they were saying, but he saw the two British officers reply to their ally with an affirmative nod. He did not stop to look at them any longer, but began to play with a recklessness which resembled despair, just as his comrades in the 25th had fought when they had found themselves between two fires at Mont-Saint-Jean. However, his good luck had quite deserted him, and from that moment he began to be utterly defeated.

He did not win once in ten times, and whenever he chose a colour the opposite colour won.

The man with the bandaged eye remained faithful to his system, and staked on the opposite colour to Lucien. Although he never laid down more than two rolls of gold at once, he had already won a considerable sum. Lucien, in his exasperation, did not spare him, but greeted every round with some sarcasm or insult. As for the Prussian, he did not flinch. It seemed evident that he did not understand the language of the conquered nation.

At the end of the fourth deal the unlucky Lucien had not only lost all his winnings, but he had only twelve thousand francs left of his own money. He had some desire to keep this money, and go off and try his luck later on, but he saw the German sneer under his great moustache, so that he threw the money upon the table with a gesture of defiance.

The final encounter did not last long. The rake swept the money away, and two rolls of gold went to swell the pile of treasure slowly amassed by his adversary. Lucien shook his fist in his face, and rose up, calling him a robber and a "gendarme of Blucher."

Then, without waiting for the reply, which he did not hope to obtain from this imperturbable personage, he rudely dashed past those who stood in his way, making for the door like a madman.

Had he turned, he would have seen that the Prussian was again speaking with the Englishmen, and that one of the officers, the tall, thin one, had left the table, and was walking towards the staircase. However, Lucien was not in a state of mind to notice what was going on around him. He had lost his head completely, and he rushed on like a wild boar, with foaming lips and haggard eyes. Every one made way for him, as no one cared to come in contact with such a madman, and his departure was greeted with mocking murmurs, which were soon drowned by the monotonous cry of the croupier: "Make your game, gentlemen."

Thérèse Vernède's unhappy lover no longer cared to play at that moment; his only thought was of blowing out his brains. "Your hat, sir," called out a servant of the establishment, where every one was required to leave his hat at the door on entering.

But for this reminder Lucien would have rushed out bare-headed, and it was enough to have his pockets empty without losing his head-gear besides.

He threw down the ivory counter which had been handed to him as he went in; and, while the servant was looking for his hat, he saw the thin Englishman go by. He could not quarrel with him, for he had won from him; but he looked behind him to see if the odious Prussian were following his ally. He did not have the satisfaction of seeing him within reach. The Prussian, no doubt, had remained behind to follow up his luck. However, the lieutenant's flashing eyes now suddenly met a face which he had not expected to see there; it was that of the little old man who had followed him one night when

leaving the café of the Rotunda. This amiable individual did not appear to remember the way in which he had been treated, for he smiled pleasantly, and nodded in the most affable manner imaginable.

The sight of him was not calculated to soothe Lucien, who was looking for some one on whom he might vent his anger. The spy—for he could not believe the man to be anything else—had come up just in time to get himself knocked down.

Still, it would have been too imprudent to knock him down there. So Lucien replied to his salutations by a grimace, which the old fellow undoubtedly took for a sign of encouragement, for he came towards him.

They crossed the stone gallery, where the English officer was already walking about, and went out into the garden. Lucien merely wished to get the spy out of the Palais-Royal to some distant spot where he could choke him, or at least thrash him. But as he turned round he saw that, instead of keeping in the rear, the old man was endeavouring to overtake him.

Although it was somewhat late, there were people in the avenues, and the place was a bad one for a thrashing. However, he could at least talk as roughly as he pleased to the old scoundrel; and so he waited for him. He expected to be accosted, as before, with an obsequious air and abject politeness. He was entirely in the wrong, however.

"Ah! sir," said the old man, "you imagine that I am following you to spy upon you. You told me so very clearly on our first meeting. I am following you, it is true, but it is because I wish to speak to you about a matter of the utmost importance."

"I have nothing to do with men like you," replied Lucien, roughly.

"The matter at hand concerns us both, and when I have told you what it is, I am sure that you will thank me for having insisted upon a hearing."

This was said with so much assurance that the ruined gamester wondered whether he had been mistaken as to the strange individual before him. "To prove to you that I am speaking the truth," added Saint-Privat, "I do not need to see you at your house, nor do I need to know your address. I merely ask the favour of a few moments' conversation without leaving this garden, and here, under these trees, if you like."

Lucien was struck by this clear, simple language, and said to himself that he might as well accept the proposal, for he had now nothing to lose excepting his life or liberty, and he could defend them both. "Very well," said he. "Come, be brief."

And, turning down a path, he sat down, and the old man placed himself beside him.

The tall Englishman was now walking outside the gallery, and his fat companion was taking the air at a window on the first floor, just above the spot where the pair were seated.

"Sir," said Saint-Privat, "you have lost a very large sum."

"What is that to you?"

"And you must now be ruined?"

"Did you bring me here to tell me that?" demanded Lucien, threateningly.

"No, sir; but to tell you that I bring you a fortune."

"A fortune!" repeated Lucien, looking scornfully at the speaker from head to foot. "What stupid jest is this?"

"Nothing can be more serious, I assure you," said Saint-Privat.

"To convince yourself of this, you have merely to listen to me. Your name is Lucien Bellefond, and you are the nephew by marriage of Colonel Lacaussade, who died, or is believed to have died, in 1812, during the retreat from Russia."

"Who told you so?" replied the young officer, whom this beginning startled.

"I learned your name the other evening at the café of the Rotunda; your relationship to the colonel was an accidental and indirect discovery."

"It is a strange one, you must admit," said Lucien, becoming more and more suspicious.

"I beg you, sir, to allow me to finish," resumed the old man. "I can well understand that I do not inspire you with any confidence since you accuse me of spying upon you. But remark, if you please, that if I had wished to do so, I should have followed you last Monday."

"It would have been a bad thing for you if you had."

"That may be, but I did not do so; and the proof of it is that I do not know where you live, for I have been looking for you everywhere for the last eight days. I might have inquired at the war office, as I knew that you were an officer. But I refrained from doing this, because I feared that you might suspect my intentions if I went to see you unexpectedly. I preferred to wait till a lucky chance enabled me to meet you, and it is for that reason that I have come to the Palais-Royal so often."

Saint-Privat spoke falsely. He had indeed been looking for Lucien, but he had begun by asking for his address at the war office, where, since the entrance of the allies, there had been such confusion that no one had been able to give it to him.

"Then you saw me playing just now," said the lieutenant.

"I have been here twenty minutes."

"Why did you wait till I had lost all my money?"

"You utter the same reproach that I addressed to myself," replied the good old man, with a look of sincere regret. "Why did I not take you away from that disastrous table? What could I do, however? The way in which you received me on the staircase shows how you would have received me at the table. I had to be patient, to my great regret."

Saint-Privat was again speaking untruly, or, at all events, he did

not reveal all his reasons for not disturbing Lucien. The truth was, however, that he had been delighted to see him lose, because he realised the officer, when utterly ruined, would be all the more disposed to agree to what he was about to propose to him.

"You would have done me a great service if you had taken me away," said Lucien, "but I doubt whether I should have listened to you. Pray go on with what you have to say."

"When you interrupted me at first, sir, I was saying to you that you were related to Colonel Lacaussade !"

"To his wife."

"To his wife, the sister of Madame Bellefond, your mother."

"Yes."

"The colonel, who was your relative by marriage, had a large fortune."

"I have never thought of his fortune, for I am not his heir-at-law."

"His heir-at-law is Monsieur Maxime Trimoulac, the son of the colonel's sister."

"You are admirably well informed, I see ; but what do you wish to arrive at ?"

"Before answering that question, allow me to remark that a nephew is not a certain heir in virtue of the law ; that is to say, that Monsieur Lacaussade was entirely at liberty to dispose of his property as he pleased, and consequently to disinherit Monsieur Trimoulac."

"Well, what of it ?"

"He was also free to leave his fortune to you. He even told you several times that he intended to leave it to you, and he was very fond of you, and treated you like a son."

"That may be, but he did not do so. It is not even certain that he is dead ; so far no one has been able to prove it."

"That is true. Not even Monsieur Trimoulac, who has tried to do so by active measures."

"He has a right to do that. But go on, I pray."

"Do you know this Maxime Trimoulac ?"

"No, nor do I desire to know him. But I have already asked you to conclude. It cannot be for the purpose of talking about this person that you have asked me to hear you."

"No, certainly not ; I am coming to the important point. What would you say if I gave you an authentic proof of the colonel's death ?"

"Nothing at all. I believe him to be dead ; however, the proof interests no one but his heir."

"What if you were his heir ?"

"I do not understand."

"What if the colonel had made a will in your favour ?"

"I should know of it. It is now three years since he died at the Berezina, and all the surviving officers of his regiment have returned to France."

"That is no proof. Your uncle may have confided his will to some other person besides a comrade."

"Not to you, I presume," said Lucien, ironically.

"No, not to me, young man. I have never been in Russia, but——"

"Let us finish. You say that the colonel has left a will."

"I am sure of it."

"In my favour?"

"You are his sole heir."

"Have you seen this will?"

"I have seen it and read it," replied Saint-Privat, lying for the third time, for he had not yet found Zenobia Capitaine.

"And you are going to give it to me?"

"The deuce! you are somewhat over-hasty, my dear sir! Business is not transacted so quickly as that. I have not brought you this will, for the simple reason that I have not got it."

"But you know where it is?"

"Yes."

"Tell me, then."

Saint-Privat gave a kind of whistle, but did not reply.

"I understand," said Lucien, half-angry, and half-hopeful, although the hope was faint. "You wish to find out whether my gratitude will be in proportion to the service which you would render me by making me rich."

"That is about it, young man," replied the ex-director of the dark room. "And I may add that this gratitude must be proved by acts."

"I understand it in the same way."

"I am delighted to find you so well disposed. What do you consider to be fair pay for a fortune which amounts to more than two millions of francs?"

"What stuff! My uncle was rich, but he was not worth two millions."

"You are wrong. He had been economising for a long time, and you must remember, also, that, as he went away in the spring of 1812, his entire income has been accumulating every year since. His man of business in Périgord could tell you that at any time."

It was Lucien's turn now to reflect before replying.

The strange news filled him with mingled hope and perplexity. He only half believed it; and yet he felt that a person like the cunning old fellow before him would not have taken the trouble to run after him for anything but a serious matter. And if the colonel had really made him his heir, Paradise would open before him at the very moment when he found himself without resources and without hope, with no refuge but death, since, being penniless, he could not hope to marry Thérèse. However, on the other hand, this man, this mealy-mouthed and mysterious person, who had fallen from the skies to offer him Colonel Lacaussade's money, filled him with instinctive mistrust and almost unconquerable dislike.

"Then you propose to sell me this will?" said Lucien, at last, to his companion.

"Yes, I do," replied Saint-Privat, without the slightest hesitation.

"You ply a pretty calling, I must say!"

"All callings have their good side. It is only people themselves who are stupid."

"What do you ask for it?"

"I wish to go shares, replied the old man, promptly and plainly.

"To go shares? What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, sir, that we shall sign a little agreement in regular form, by which I will agree to hand you your uncle's will and the certificate of his death, and you will agree to give me a million francs in exchange for it. I name this figure to avoid all further discussion, and I assure you that it is much less than half of the inheritance. I might content myself with your word of honour, of course, but one never knows who may live or who may die. Besides, I shall also ask you to give me your solemn word when we execute our contract; for of course I do not require the million in cash down at once. After all your losses up there you would find it hard, I presume, to give me anything before entering into possession of the money left you by Colonel Lacaussade."

Lucien was about to reply to these proposals, which were certainly clear enough, when he felt a hand laid upon his shoulder. He quickly turned round, and saw the tall, thin English officer, who was looking at him. The phlegmatic son of Albion had crept up behind the chairs on which Lucien and Saint-Privat were seated, and had arrived unheard. The lieutenant, equally surprised and irritated, rose up abruptly, and said to the indiscreet Briton: "What do you want with me, sir?"

"I? Nothing," replied the Englishman, speaking French with a strong accent. "It is an officer, a friend of mine, who wishes to speak to you immediately, sir."

"Where is this officer who is a friend of yours?"

"There he is under the trees at the end of the avenue, with another friend of mine."

The lieutenant looked and saw that two men were standing under a linden-tree, some twenty paces from him. Meantime, Saint-Privat, disconcerted by the appearance of the red-coat, and annoyed at being disturbed at the most interesting part of his conversation, had also risen, and was looking alternately at the Englishman and Lucien to find out what it all meant. "I hope that you are not going to leave me," said he, in a low tone, to Lucien.

"Let me alone!" replied the young officer.

"He had guessed at once that the "friend" spoken of was none other than the Prussian, who had made up his mind, after all, to ask him to explain his conduct, and he would not for anything in the world have delayed doing so. The old man's proposal certainly

interested him, but not enough to make him forget his anger, and the opportunity was too favourable for him to draw back. "Well, sir," said he to the Englishman, "I am ready to go with you."

This time the old man could not contain himself. "What!" he exclaimed, "are you going to leave me without giving me an answer?"

"I will answer you by-and-by."

"By-and-by! but I cannot wait. Remember that every day is being turned to account by our adversary, for we have one, do not forget that—the colonel's nephew——"

"I have not time now, I tell you. If you were in such a hurry, why did you not choose a better time?"

"How could I? Have not I been looking for you for a week?"

"I am sorry for it; but I must speak with this gentleman."

"If I let you go, where shall I find you again?" exclaimed Saint-Privat, in a piteous tone.

"Wherever you like."

"But I do not even know your address."

"Well, then, wait here for me."

"Will you promise me to return?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"When I have finished yonder."

"Will it take long?"

"I do not know; but if you are so anxious to see me again to-night, I shan't prevent you from walking about under these trees. In that way you will not lose sight of me, and you will be sure of finding me when I have done talking. It will not take long, I believe."

"Then you will allow me to watch you?"

"At a distance, yes. But if you come too near, our agreement will end. I shall force you to retire."

"Oh, do not be afraid!" answered Saint-Privat. "I shall take good care not to infringe our understanding. I am too anxious to talk with you again to expose myself to your anger, and I obey you in your interest more than in mine. Remember, sir, there are more than two millions to be shared between us."

Lucien was not listening now. He had made a sign to the Englishman that he was ready to start off with him, and the latter, like an interminable compass with his long legs, was now walking along the avenue. Lieutenant Bellefond followed, and Saint-Privat, in despair, raised his hands to heaven, deploring what he called the young man's madness. He did not, however, profit by the permission given him to walk up and down the avenue, but contented himself with bestriding a chair, and glancing towards the group.

Lucien had hastened on to join the odious foreigner who had made him lose his money. He had already forgotten the old man and his uncle's will, and was only thinking of revenge upon the

wretched German, whom he looked upon as responsible for the downfall of all his hopes. The Prussian was quietly waiting for him, with the other Englishman, who looked like a pipe of that port wine which some Britons are so fond of. They were stationed in the darkest corner of the shady pathway, and had been looking on while their friend spoke with the Frenchman.

The lieutenant then remembered that the tall, thin man, the man who looked so much like Wellington, had gone downstairs at the same time as he himself had left No. 154, and that he had caught sight of his inseparable friend at a window near enough to make signs to him in the garden. It was evident that one had sent the other after Lucien, and that one had stayed behind with the Prussian, who had no doubt remained to amass some additional winnings before leaving the card-table.

"It seems that the old fool finally found out that I insulted him," said Lucien to himself; "and he must be less patient than I supposed. Well, so much the better; I shall have great satisfaction in putting a few inches of steel into him." He soon saw that he was not mistaken. The Prussian was there, standing up stiffly in his uniform, and looking like a wild boar brought to bay against a tree. His single eye shone in the shade, and his mouth was open as though he were breathing hard. This single eye expressed such intense anger and hatred that Lucien thought for a moment that a trap had been laid for him, and that he had done wrong in complying with the invitation of the red-coat. He did not understand what kind of explanation the German was about to ask for, as he did not appear to speak any language but his own, at least to judge from his obstinate silence at the gaming-table.

He was soon satisfied upon this point. "Sir," said the terrible, one-eyed man, in excellent French, and without the slightest foreign accent, "you are an officer, are you not?"

"I am a lieutenant in the 25th of the line, a regiment that was at Jena and at Friedland," replied Lucien, haughtily.

"And at Ligny, I presume?" said the foreigner, mockingly.

"At Ligny also, where it did its best to exterminate all the Prussians down to the very last, in which, unfortunately, it did not succeed. I presume that you did not send for me to ask me my rank in the army, however?"

"No, sir; I wished to know whether you were in Bonaparte's army for two reasons—the first is because I do not wish to commit myself with the first man I meet; and the second is because, knowing that you have fought against my country, I shall have all the more pleasure in killing you."

"Aha! you mean to kill me, do you? That is a very laudable intention. It seems that you are not deaf, as I imagined."

"No, sir; I did not lose one of the insulting expressions that you made use of."

"Then you are very patient, for if you had said one-half as

much to me upstairs, I should have boxed your ears then and there."

"I have a different way of acting, and we shall see presently which is the best. Besides, I saw that you were losing, and I felt sure that my presence annoyed you, and made you lose. I longed to enjoy that pleasure to the end."

"Eh, sir!" exclaimed Lucien, with a threatening gesture.

The Englishmen wished to interfere at this, but the Prussian thrust them aside, saying: "No, no, gentlemen. I am curious to see whether a French officer will behave like a street-porter or not."

These words made Lucien restrain himself, and he endeavoured to appear calm as he replied: "Pray let us end all this. You bore my insults so as to get my money. This conduct does not surprise me on the part of a German. In Prussia, men are naturally prudent and avaricious. Well, now that you have grown rich by making me poor, what more do you want with me?"

"Can you ask? I want satisfaction."

"Of what sort, if you please? Must I go back to the gambling-house, and give you another chance to win on the black what I stake on the red?"

"No more joking! You know very well what I mean. I want satisfaction in a duel."

"Indeed! Why, you must know that it is impossible."

"Impossible! Why?"

"Because you have only one eye, and one arm, and a man cannot fight with an invalid."

"Is that your only reason for refusing to give me satisfaction, after insulting me?"

"Yes; but it is enough, and to my great regret; for there is nothing I long for so much as to fight a duel with a Prussian."

"Then, sir," replied the German, with the utmost coolness, "you can do so at once. These two wounds which I received from the French, place me at a disadvantage, it is true, but it rests with you to equalise the chances."

"How? You do not expect, I presume, that I shall put out one of my eyes, and cut off my arm? I should like to kill you, but my desire is not keen enough for me to mutilate myself in order to do so."

"I should not hesitate, sir, if I were in your place, and if that were the only way. But Germans are different from Frenchmen, who are never brave in the dark, and who reserve their courage for broad daylight, amid the sound of fifes and drums, and with flourish and display."

"Will you finish, sir? What do you mean by exasperating me like this? Take care——"

"If you will listen, instead of interrupting me, you will see that I mean what I say, and that the quarrel can be settled as it should be settled between officers. You do not wish to put out one of your

eyes. Very well ; but you can allow one of them to be bandaged. You do not wish to lose an arm ; but it can be tied up so that you cannot use it."

"That is very ingenious," replied Lucien, in an ironical tone ; "and I only regret that you have not a wooden leg as well, so that I might have a chance of tying up my own leg, too. What sort of duel would it be if I did as you say ? Neither of us could hold a sword, for a man cannot put himself on guard properly when he has but one arm, nor defend himself without falling upon his nose ; moreover, with one eye only, although a man can take aim, it would not be an equal match, for I am not used to wearing a bandage on my eye, and you, perhaps, have been bandaged up ever since you were born."

"One of your soldiers put out my eye not a month ago."

"Good ! On the 15th June, at Ligny. He was a good soldier, I see, and if I knew where to find him, I would take him with me. We were saying that the pistol is as unavailable as the sword, so I do not see what weapon we could use. Unless, indeed, you mean to fight with cannon."

"That would be more difficult than anything else, for the weapon you speak of could not be had, as we took all your artillery at Waterloo, and here at Paris as well," replied the Prussian, coolly. "However, I wish to spare you the trouble of guessing. We will fight, if you are willing, with knives."

"With knives ! What sort of a joke is this ?"

"Nothing can be more serious. The knife is as good as any other weapon, and I cannot imagine what objection you can make to it."

"It is the weapon of a butcher or a murderer."

"What does that matter ? It makes frightful wounds, and it kills people. That is all that is necessary."

"Go to the devil with your inventions ! I know how to use a sword and a pistol, but not a knife."

"That is to say, sir, you are afraid."

"Afraid ! I ?" howled Lucien.

"Yes, afraid. I defy you to give any other serious reason for your refusal. You were not brought up among the old French nobility, who only fought with red heels and a court sword. You cannot make anyone believe that Bonaparte's soldiers object to duelling."

"Stop your joking, sir, or I——"

"I shall not stop joking till you agree to fight. It would really be too bad to insult an officer in the grossest manner, and publicly, and then refuse to give him the satisfaction which he has a right to ask for, and that under pretence that his wounds prevent him from defending himself. You should have remembered that I was wounded when you were in the gambling-house, not here."

"I will not refuse to give you satisfaction, when you are in a con-

dition to ask for it. Get well ; I will wait ; and in six months' time you will find me ready to fight with you. But I repeat that I will not fight with knives. I leave that to the Spanish, the allies of your good friends the English."

"And I, sir, repeat that I have not time to wait, as I may leave Paris to-morrow, by order of my sovereign, and it does not suit me to remain under the humiliation of your insults, which were levelled at me in the presence of several of your fellow-countrymen, for whom I care very little, however; but there were also present some very honourable officers of the allied armies, whose esteem I desire to retain."

As he listened to this very logical discourse, Lucien ground his teeth and clenched his fists; however, he could not help admitting that the Prussian reasoned very well, and he began to feel that he had no further argument to bring forward. On the other hand, the duel seemed to him more and more impossible. Suddenly, an idea occurred to him. "Gentlemen," said he, addressing the two English officers, "I leave the matter to you, and I will accept your views, whatever they may be."

"I also agree to do as they say," said the Prussian.

The tall Englishman conferred for an instant with the short Englishman, and then said with the utmost coolness: "Gentlemen, our opinion is that the form of duel proposed by Major Von Gruner is admissible."

"You hear, sir?" said the Prussian.

"Yes, sir, I have heard," replied Lucien, "and I cannot understand how two brave officers can say that civilised beings can fight like savages."

"Take care ; you said that——"

"I know perfectly well that I have promised, and it is idle to remind me of it. I accept the opinion of these gentlemen. But I am curious to know whether we shall find seconds for such a duel."

"Why not?"

"No one, I am sure, would authorise such butchery by witnessing it."

"You are mistaken," said the Prussian, quietly. "Here are Sir Archibald McKelly and the Honourable Mr. Glover, two officers of the English army, who will not refuse to give their services."

"Is that true, gentlemen?" said Lucien, turning to the Englishmen.

The two natives of Great Britain glanced at one another, and the tall one replied: "Our companion, Major Von Gruner, told us that his intention was to fight such a duel, and we made no objection. We cannot withdraw now. But it seems more proper that this gentleman, who is a Frenchman, should have a countryman of his own as a second."

"Thank you, sir," said Thérèse's lover, with a bow. "You have expressed a feeling which does you honour, and to reciprocate

the interest which you take in me, I must introduce myself, as is customary in your own country. My name is Lucien Bellefond ; and I am, or rather I was—for I have just sent in my resignation—a lieutenant in the 25th Regiment of the line."

"Very well, sir," replied the tall Englishman, evidently pleased by the proof of good breeding that Lucien had given ; "you consent to fight, then, if you can find a Frenchman to be your second ?"

"I consent to fight, certainly. As to finding a Frenchman who will be present at such a duel, that is another matter. If it were a regular duel, I should merely need to walk for five minutes or so up and down the galleries to find a comrade who would be happy to render me this little service ; but with the conditions that this gentleman has stated, I know that none of my acquaintances would consent."

"This is another excuse for not fighting," said the major, in a low tone.

"I do not wish to avoid fighting, and I will show you that I do not," retorted the young officer, drawing himself up. "These gentlemen suit me, and I will be contented with their presence."

"Ah ! at last !" exclaimed the Prussian.

The Englishmen, however, seemed less desirous than he was of ending the matter as he wished. The stout man took the other aside, and they talked for some time together. "Well, sir," said the tall one, who was always the speaker, no doubt because he spoke the better French, "we think it indispensable that one of your own countrymen should be present at this duel."

"The deuce you do !" said Lucien. "You place me in a very difficult position. Whom can I apply to ? A soldier will never consent to this, and a civilian would faint away if I dared to propose it."

"Why ? The duel will be fair, and——"

"Unless, indeed—— I do not promise, but I have an idea. The old man does not look very valiant," muttered Lucien to himself, "but as a mute witness he will do as well as anybody." And thereupon he started up the avenue towards the spot where Saint-Privat was waiting for him.

"Where are you going ?" demanded the Prussian roughly.

"I have no account to render you of my conduct," replied Lucien. "But it suits me to say to these gentlemen that I was speaking just now with a person, a Frenchman, who will not refuse to be my second, if I ask him ; and I am going to speak to him."

"True," said the tall, thin man ; "I saw this gentleman talking with a person who is sitting over there."

"I can find him. Don't be uneasy, it will not take long, and I have no intention of going away until we have settled the hour and place of meeting by common agreement."

"The hour is now," replied the officer, dryly ; "the place is the first lonely spot near by."

"Ah! then it is not enough to fight with knives, we must fight by night as well, it seems?" exclaimed Lucien.

"Such is indeed my desire," replied the major coldly. "When I am insulted, I do not go to bed till I have washed out the affront in blood."

"We will wash it out with your own blood," replied Lucien, in exasperation. The German's boasting was fully calculated to enrage him.

"We shall fight with knives, then," he added, "and fight now, and till one of us dies, I suppose?"

"Till one of us dies."

"Then let me go and find my second." And without further delay he turned his back upon the Prussian and strode towards the spot where Saint-Privat was sitting.

Lucien Bellefond was now so angry that he scarcely took time to think. Had he been cool, he would not for a moment have thought of asking a quiet old man to act as a second at an insane combat. However, the insolence of the Prussian, following upon his ill-luck, had fairly frenzied him. Ruined hopelessly, and vigorously assailed by one of the invaders, whom he detested, Thérèse's poor lover was fairly distracted, and this abominable duel, which he would under any other circumstances have rejected as equivalent to assassination, he now accepted without flinching. It was a final crisis brought about by chance in a hopeless situation, and he longed to fight. The image of Thérèse certainly arose before his troubled mind, but he dismissed it by a great effort, fearing, perhaps, that he should grow cowardly if he thought of his vanished hopes. His mind was less occupied as regards his recent singular conversation with Saint-Privat, and all the wills in the world would not have prevented him from carrying the matter to the bitter end. His only anxiety was to ascertain whether the quiet little man would consent to go with him, and this he doubted.

As he went along the avenue he said to himself that the mere proposition would make the fortune-hunter take flight, and he formed the wise resolution of not telling him the exact nature of the business in which he required his assistance.

"Here you are at last!" exclaimed the old man, as Lucien came up. "You have made me very anxious, my dear partner, for we are partners now. Would you believe it, I even imagined that you had had a quarrel with those foreign officers. I see that there is nothing of the kind, however, fortunately, so that we can resume our little chat at once."

"We can resume it to-morrow at our leisure. Just now, it is impossible, and besides, I have a service to ask of you."

"A service? What is it? I agree with pleasure."

"I beg of you to come with me."

"Where?"

"To those foreign officers who frighten you so much."

"But why?"

"Because we have an affair to settle that must be brought to an end at once and here."

"What is it?"

"You annoy me! What does it matter what I have to say to those people? I was talking with you just now; can't I talk with them also?"

"But this is not the same thing; and if there is an affair of honour—as you military men call it—afoot——"

"You will see. Come along!"

"No, no. Let us talk first about your uncle's will, and when we have agreed as to the little contract which I proposed, then——"

"This is no time for signing contracts. Follow me, and to-morrow we will see about all that."

"To-morrow—to-morrow," repeated Saint-Privat in perplexity.

"Can I rely upon your signing to-morrow?"

"I promise nothing," was Lucien's retort. "We will talk it over again."

"Ah, young man, you are very giddy, and I assure you that you will bitterly regret it if you don't listen to me, for the colonel's fortune may escape you. Such a fortune, too! More than two millions of francs; and remember that another man wishes to secure them, another man who will have them if you don't act in time. Besides, I only ask you for one-half."

"Never mind the colonel and his two millions, I tell you! I have no time to think of all that just now."

"But to-morrow—perhaps it will be too late."

"Are you coming or not?"

"Not without knowing where you mean to take me."

"I have already told you."

"Yes, to those swashbucklers, who will gobble us up when they get us alone. I won't go!"

"Good-night, then," said Lucien, starting off again.

"You are going to leave me, then?" cried the distressed Saint-Privat, in a mournful tone.

"Of course I am, as you will not come with me."

"But tell me, in heaven's name, where I can see you again."

"I don't know."

"When will you return?"

"Never!"

After giving this clear answer, Lucien turned away and started to join his adversaries.

"Young man, one word, I beg," said the old fellow.

"Not one. I have nothing more to say to you."

"But if I do as you ask me to do."

"Then it will be a different matter. I shall be quite willing to hear you to-morrow."

"To-morrow—always to-morrow! Why not to-night?"

"Because I have lost too much time already, and cannot lose any more. Good-bye."

Saint-Privat at first let the lieutenant walk away. He was like a shopkeeper who lets a customer depart when they do not agree as to the price of an object, but who hopes that the would-be purchaser will come back again. However, when he saw that Lucien had reached the third tree in the avenue, and that the fiery young fellow was really going away, he could not bear it. It seemed to him that his million was flying off from him, and he would have run after it to the uttermost ends of the earth. So he darted after Lucien, who was only too willing to be overtaken, and soon joined him.

"Here I am!" exclaimed the old fellow, quite out of breath with his run; "I have to yield to you. Ah! young man! young man! if I did not feel a lively interest in you I would not have anything to do with such an adventure as this, for it is quite an adventure to mix at this time of the night with officers belonging to the allied armies, who need only make a sign to their soldiers for us to be cut up into mince-meat."

"Hold your tongue, you coward!" exclaimed Lucien, catching hold of his arm.

"If I were only sure that you would sign our little contract to-morrow——"

"Well, then, I will," replied the officer, who saw the necessity of making peace with the old man if he wanted the Englishman to take him as a second. "I will sign your contract to-morrow on one condition."

"What is it? Speak! I accept it beforehand!" exclaimed Saint-Privat, wild with delight.

"On conditions that from this moment, whatever you may hear, and whatever I may do, you will not open your lips. This is not asking much, for I only require your presence and your silence. But if you attempt to go away you will be sorry for it, I promise you!"

"Well, if you do not ask me to take any active part in anything, I consent to stay, though I hardly like to agree to it without knowing what may happen."

"It is quite useless for you to know, and, to remove your last scruples, I will give you my word of honour that your precious person will not be in any danger whatever."

"I will go with you, young man," replied Saint-Privat; "and I promise to say nothing."

"Come along, then," said Lucien. And he dragged his reluctant second onward, for fear he might yet try to escape.

"You have stayed away a long time, sir," said the Prussian, when Lucien reappeared with Saint-Privat beside him.

"That may be so," said Lucien, dryly, "but I have brought this gentleman, whom I have succeeded in inducing to accompany me, and I am now at your orders."

The terrible major looked at the old man contemptuously, and was about to indulge in some sarcastic remark ; but the Englishmen, who were very formal and polite, made a sign to him to say nothing, and the tallest called out : "Come, gentlemen." Lucien did not ask where they were taking him, but they started off in two groups, the Prussian and the two Englishmen ahead, and the lieutenant and Saint-Privat in the rear. They made a short cut across the garden and reached the Montpensier gallery, not far from the wooden galleries, which then occupied the spot where the Orleans gallery now stands.

"I'll wager that this madman wants to fight on some lonely quay beside the Seine," thought Lucien. "Well, so much the better ! When I have killed him, I shall be only too glad to pitch his ugly carcass into the river."

Saint-Privat, faithful to his promise, walked on without saying a word, but he was busy thinking ; his active brain was greatly over-excited, and his conjectures were many and various. He considered that this stroll in the wake of three officers of the allied armies could scarcely have a pacific motive, and he suddenly remembered the hostile words spoken by Lucien Bellefond while playing against the Prussian. And at the mere thought of seeing his dear heir expose himself to being killed, the good old man was ready to faint, so great was his interest—in the inheritance. However, he was naturally observing ; he had already noticed some points which kept up his spirits. In the first place, he had remarked that the fierce-looking foe had his arm in a sling and a bandage over his left eye. Now, a man with only one arm is not apt to be a good fighter, especially when he has but one eye. Besides, people do not usually fight duels by night. Saint-Privat knew all this, and was beginning to believe that the matter would merely result in a more or less stormy conversation which his young friend wished to carry on in the presence of a fellow-countryman, so as to have a witness to show that he had acted honourably throughout. Lucien, of course, let him think what he pleased. He held him now, and was determined to keep him, happen what might.

When they reached the end of the stone gallery the thin Englishman left the party, and waited for the lieutenant to come up, whereupon he said : "Will you come with me, sir, to choose the weapons ?"

As he spoke he pointed to a cutler's shop, which happened to be still open in spite of the late hour.

"There's no need of that ; I rely upon you," replied Lucien at once.

"Thanks," said the Englishman, flattered by this confidence on the part of an enemy. "I will go, then, and buy them. Besides, you will draw lots when we reach the spot." And he then went into the shop, while his companions waited for him at the entrance of a street near the Rue Montpensier.

Lucien followed on with his reluctant second, and took good care to prevent the old man from asking him any indiscreet questions. "I have found what is necessary," said the Englishman, who presently returned.

"Very well, go on, I will follow you," replied the lieutenant, in a low tone.

They now left the Palais-Royal. "What a strange idea for that officer to make purchases at this time of night!" suddenly said Saint-Privat. "What can he have bought of that cutler?"

"Razors, most likely," replied Lucien, with a shrug.

"The English are so peculiar!" said the old man, who was obliged to be satisfied with this reply.

Meantime the foreigners had reached the Rue Saint-Honoré, which was very lonely that night, and they were now going towards the Rue Royale.

"The deuce take me if I know where they are going!" muttered Lucien.

It was now nearly midnight, for all these preliminaries had taken up a lot of time, and even in this usually crowded neighbourhood there were but few pedestrians to be seen. They occasionally met patrols in red coats, and Saint-Privat seemed annoyed by this, for he muttered sundry remarks which Lucien only partially overheard, but in which he caught the oft-repeated word—imprudence. However, the old man kept on, and showed no intention of going away.

It is probable that he mainly feared losing sight of the colonel's heir, for it was certainly no wish to please the latter that made him remain.

Lucien was already cursing the fate that had brought about this dangerous adventure; but what he regretted above all things was the loss of Thérèse—Thérèse, whom he scarcely hoped to see again, no matter how the duel might end. If he were killed, his death would in all probability remain unknown to her; and he said to himself bitterly that his disappearance would naturally cause all sorts of conjectures, and that his affianced bride would, no doubt, accuse him of unfaithfulness and treachery. On the other hand, even if he survived this terrible encounter, his situation would not be improved. How could he now appear again before M. Vernède? How could he tell him that he had spoken falsely, that his pretended fortune was a mere dream, that he had hoped to obtain it at the gaming-table, and had found only ruin there? How could he make the daughter believe that his love of her had led him to destruction. The unfortunate lieutenant felt overwhelmed with shame at the mere thought of appearing before her and confessing what he had done.

"It would be a thousand times better to let that Prussian kill me," he muttered. "Yes, I had better wound him mortally, and let him kill me."

They now turned into the Rue Royale, and the party of officers

went towards the left. "They are certainly taking me to the river," thought Lucien.

The open space which then bore the name of Louis XV., after having been called the Place de la Revolution, and which finally was called the Place de la Concorde, the vast esplanade where the guillotine had remained erected, from the time of the king's execution until the 9th Thermidor, had then little or no resemblance to the present square, commonly called the finest in Europe.

Not only was there no obelisk nor monumental fountain, but there was no light nor pavement, and on each of the four sides there were marshy moats, in which the weeds grew thickly. These moats, which afterwards served for gardens, aviaries, and menageries, were not filled up till the reign of Louis-Philippe, and they helped to make the spot a vast solitude, where the Parisians did not willingly venture in the middle of the night.

The allied troops had camped there on the night of their arrival in Paris, but since then they had been sent to sheds expressly erected for them on the quays, or to lodgings at the houses of the citizens. There were some fires lighted under the trees in the Champs Elysées by detachments of Highlanders, and the entrance of the avenue and the gate of the draw-bridge were guarded by sentinels, who were walking up and down.

The spot was therefore free, and seemed well suited for two men to fight there undisturbed. Such, indeed, appeared to be the opinion of the foreigners, for they stopped near the first moat on the left, on turning out of the Rue Royale.

"This appears to be the place," muttered Lucien, "and it is not a bad one, although their soldiers are rather near. We may thus be interrupted; but that is their look-out."

"Is it here that you are going to confer with these gentlemen?" asked Saint-Privat, timidly.

"Yes; let us come forward," replied Lucien; "and above all, not a word, no matter what may occur."

The ex-manager of the dark room hung his head and went on. He was more anxious than ever, but he did not yet guess everything, as the Place Louis XV. was not an habitual meeting-place for duellists.

"Well, gentlemen," said the lieutenant, calmly, "it seems to me that this is a suitable place. We can begin whenever you like."

"Let us begin now," growled the Prussian.

The Englishmen seemed to be less eager. They had already exchanged a few words in a low tone, and after apparently agreeing together, they started a very animated conversation with the major. Lucien did not understand a word of it, as they spoke in German. He waited, and whistled the "Marseillaise," and was beginning to feel impatient, when suddenly the tall Englishman came up to him.

"Sir," said he, "this is a lonely spot, but the first pedestrian may come this way. We therefore run the risk of being disturbed."

"Well, let us go further off."

"No, your adversary is tired, and it would not be fair to force him to walk any further."

"I cannot carry him on my back, however."

"There is a way of arranging everything, if you will trust to me."

"I have already told you to arrange everything as you please."

"Well then," said the officer, "I will do so; look here." So speaking, he pointed to two bright points that seemed to be approaching—two lamps coming along over the Louis XV. bridge, and advancing rapidly.

"What is that?" demanded Lucien.

"You see," replied the Englishman, "it is a coach."

"A coach! Ah! I see! It will take us to the Bois de Boulogne. That is capital, and I don't know why I did not think of it before."

"No, that is not what I mean. Our friend, Major Von Gruner, is in a hurry, and has not time to go any further."

"Then what do you want with the coach? I do not understand you."

"You shall see."

It was indeed a hackney-coach that was now leisurely coming up, drawn by two scrawny horses. It was one of the heavy vehicles made like those fashionable in the time of Louis XIV., and a few of which still existed at the end of the Restoration, and were thought very convenient by our fathers. There were six seats, and even room for eight, if desired. The body was perched on high wheels, and reached by steps like ladders. The cushions were far from soft, and the doors were pierced with apertures like the port-holes of a man-of-war, which admitted very little air or light; however, the interior was so long, so wide, and so high that any one could stand up or lie down inside. These huge, massive vehicles suited the patriarchal habits of the commoners of those happy days when they went to dine on the grass at the Près Saint-Gervais. The little brougham-like vehicle, which accommodates only two passengers, is a very recent innovation. It was invented during the latter part of the reign of Louis-Philippe, and it is, of course, well suited to present customs, for we have omnibuses for the accommodation of large parties.

The vehicle which was now approaching made a loud noise, with its creaky springs, as it rolled over the bad ground, and its huge body soon emerged from the darkness around. It was driven by a man perched on the box, fully six feet above the ground. He wore a huge hat, and a coat with a number of capes. The lamps, which were large, gave sufficient light to show the group of men loitering beside the moat. Lucien thought that the driver reined in on catching sight of them, and showed an inclination to turn back. During the occupation lonely places were not safe, and the prudent driver was mistrustful. However, he was too late in his desire to retreat, for the tall Englishman ran quickly towards the horses, took them by the bridle, and then said to the driver: "Come down at once!"

The fellow hesitated for an instant, and even took up his whip with the evident intention of striking the individual who had ventured to touch his horses. However, he soon recognised the red coat of the English officer, and he refrained, lest he might bring himself into trouble with one of the conquerors of France, who were then absolute masters of Paris. "Come down!" repeated the phlegmatic islander, without letting go of the reins.

This time the driver made up his mind to obey. He rose from his seat and got down as quickly as his clogs and heavy coat would allow. "Here I am, sir," said he, reluctantly. "Do you want me by the hour or the trip?"

"What will you take for your coach?" asked the Englishman.

"It is not for sale."

"No matter. I want to buy it."

"But it is not mine. I am only a poor devil of a driver; and if I do not take the trap to the coach-house my master will send me to prison. You had better go to him. He'll let you have it cheap."

"I've no time to go to your master. I must have your coach immediately, and as you won't sell it, I will hire it."

"Oh, that's another matter. I make it my business to let it. Get in, sir, and I'll take you wherever you like, you and your friends too; don't be afraid, there's room for all five of you."

"You don't understand me. I want to hire this coach, but I want to drive it myself. You must let me get up on to your box and go wherever you please, provided it is some distance off."

"But, my good sir," exclaimed the driver, in a tearful tone, "where shall I find my coach again, if you take it away without telling where you are going?"

"Your coach won't be taken away from this spot here, and you shall have it back in an hour at the most."

"Well, then, if you pay me well."

"Here are five guineas," said the Englishman, taking from his pocket some gold coins which he had not lost at the gaming table.

"Five guineas! What are guineas?"

"These represent about a hundred and thirty francs."

The driver put the money in his pocket: "Citizen," said he, "you are a man worth talking to. Take the coach and horses and all belonging to them. I will go and get a drink at a place near here, and I'll be back in an hour. But take care to leave the trap at the corner of the Rue Royale, and be careful, for the grey mare on the off-side kicks."

Thereupon the obliging driver went off, but not without handing his whip to the Englishman. "What does all this mean?" demanded Lucien.

"Well, sir," said the British officer, "this is my idea. You have consented to fight with knives, have you not?"

"Yes, but I do not see——"

"Well, you cannot fight on the esplanade, for you might be interrupted at any moment; besides, the matter must be ended."

"Certainly."

"Well, our friend, Major von Gruner, and you can both get into this coach with your knives in hand; I will climb upon the coach-box and drive. We will agree, if you like, that I shall go slowly round this square, and, when I have done so, the duel shall be considered over, no matter what the result may be."

"That is certainly an original idea," said the astonished but undismayed lieutenant. "A duel in a coach is a new thing, and I have no objection to offer on my own part. It remains to be seen, however, if your German objects."

"He has already agreed to it; I asked him, and it suited him exactly."

"Very well, then," said Lucien, calmly.

The Englishman bowed and rejoined his friends.

That mild old man, Saint-Privat, had not lost a word of this dialogue, and he now understood only too well what was going on. "Ah!" he exclaimed, in despair, "I hope that this is a joke, and that you don't really mean to consent to this abominable proposal?"

"You are mistaken, my dear sir, I do consent to it, and I will add that nothing could suit me better than to fight in a coach."

"You cannot mean it! Just think! if you are killed in this frightful contest, your uncle's will won't be of any use to us."

"It will go to my heirs, if any exist, as my uncle died first."

"Yes, but I am not your heir; and for want of a contract, which it would cost you very little to sign, I shall, if you are killed, lose the just reward of all my care and trouble."

"I am very sorry, but I cannot help it. All the notaries are in bed just now, and you cannot suppose that I shall wake them up at this hour."

"We don't need a notary for a simple contract between ourselves."

Saint-Privat might have gone on speaking for ever, for Lucien was not listening to him. He was looking at his adversary, who had come forward with his two seconds, and he only thought of putting a good face upon the matter. "Well, sir," now said the thin Englishman, "here are two knives which I bought at the Palais-Royal. They are of the same length, and equally sharp. You can see that."

"Never mind! I believe you to be a man of honour and will take whichever you give me," replied the lieutenant.

"I am flattered by your confidence, but it is better that you should draw lots, and we will do so. I must remind you that your eye must be bandaged, and one of your arms tied up. I did not bring any rope, however, because I thought that an officer ought not to be tied up like a malefactor. My scarf will do; and as for the bandage, a handkerchief will suffice."

"It is for me to thank you," answered Lucien with some emotion, "you are a man of feeling, I see, and you understand a soldier's sentiments."

The Englishman bowed, and replied: "You are ready, then?"

"Yes, I am ready. But I must ask one thing of you."

"Speak, sir, and if you allude to any message or last wishes you desire to have carried out, in the event of your death, I will willingly attend to the matter, and I give you my word of honour that I will be scrupulously exact as to anything that you may ask of me."

"I do not doubt it, sir; but it is not exactly that which I allude to. If I am killed, I only ask you to leave my body in the coach. But if, on the contrary, I have the pleasure of killing my antagonist, I may run a great risk. Paris belongs to you, the allies, and you can do as you please here. A French officer who had killed a Prussian officer would be exposed to serious annoyance, perhaps even be condemned by a court-martial and shot within twenty-four hours."

"Oh, that is impossible," said Sir Archibald M'Kelly. "My comrade and I will be ready to testify that everything was conducted in an honourable manner."

"That is just what I wished to ask you to do," said Lucien. "May I rely upon your evidence?"

"I pledge you my word."

"And you will shield me from all the consequences which this duel may have?"

"Yes, sir, I will guarantee that."

"That is all that I have to ask. I am at your orders."

"We will draw lots as to the knives and the seats."

"The seats?"

"Certainly. As you will fight in the coach, it would, perhaps, be better to sit on the back seat instead of on the front one."

"The difference seems trifling to me, but do as you please."

They began by the choice of weapons. The Englishman took a few coins from his pocket and held them out with his closed hand towards the Prussian, who said: "Odd!"

There were four coins, however, and the Prussian had lost. Lucien then chose one of the knives at haphazard. They now went on to the choice of places, and this time chance favoured the major.

These preliminaries came to an end without a word from Saint-Privat. He was so completely overwhelmed by all that he saw and heard that his voice expired in his throat. And it was, in fact, a strange sight to see these men making ready for a duel; and such a duel!

The coach stood by like a shipwrecked vessel, for the horses had not stirred. The two wretched mares, which had gone up and down Paris all day long, were only too glad of a rest, and hung their heads dejectedly as they sought for absent provender upon the ground. The Prussian, as stiff as a pole, rested solidly upon his legs, with his

head in the air and his eye blazing, as he grasped the knife which had fallen to him; he seemed impatient to begin the contest. The fat Englishman wiped his face with a cambric handkerchief, and then puffed like an angry sea-lion.

Lucien, pale but calm, was waiting in a haughty attitude for the tall Englishman to bind up his eye and tie up his arm. The unfortunate Saint-Privat was the only person present who gave unequivocal signs of fear. It was not because he ran any risk himself, but his own life at that moment was not dearer to him than was the life of Lieutenant Bellefond.

If the young officer were killed in the abominable fray, the million coveted by the director of the dark room would be lost. Such a fine affair, so miraculously discovered and so skilfully managed, would then come to nought; and to feel that it was slipping away from him was enough to make Saint-Privat lose his mind; and, indeed, he looked as though he had lost it.

Ah! if he had only been able to persuade Lucien to write three lines on the first bit of paper at hand, accepting his conditions, he might yet have consoled himself; for the officer had lived three years longer than his uncle the colonel, and therefore had a full right to the property, and could transmit it. In this case Saint-Privat would have had to come to terms with Lucien's heirs. But how could he treat with a man who in five minutes more would be fighting to the death, and how could he persuade him to sign an agreement on his knees or on his hat? Something very like this took place, however. To the great surprise of Saint-Privat, the young man took a note book from his pocket, wrote a short sentence and an address upon it, tore out the leaf, and then, taking his trembling second aside, he said to him in a curt tone:

"You are very desirous of sharing my uncle's property with me, are you not? Well, this is my will. If I do not return alive from the drive that I am about to take with this German, deliver this paper to Monsieur Vernède in the Rue des Bourdonnais, No. 75. He knows the person whom I have made my sole heir. Nothing then need prevent your making arrangements."

"Oh, sir, this is grand, this is sublime!" exclaimed Saint-Privat, "but it would not take any more time to sign your name to a promise."

"Go to the devil!" exclaimed Lucien. "I will sign nothing more. In this way I feel sure that you will deliver the letter at its address."

The young officer had at this supreme moment naturally thought of Thérèse, and had said to himself that by leaving his money to her he might enrich her, providing that what the cunning old man had said was true. If, on the contrary, the will of Colonel Lacaussade only existed in his imagination, Thérèse would at least know that Lucien had thought of her at his last hour. Saint-Privat was not satisfied at all, although he

made haste to put the letter away in a large pocket-book. He did not rely much upon coming to any understanding with this M. Vernède, whom he did not at all know, and he did not disguise from himself the fact that his only serious hopes depended upon the life of the lieutenant. And the latter was in danger of immediate death, or rather his life hung by a thread. The Prussian was already brandishing his knife, in order to accustom his hand to the use of the frightful weapon.

The tall Englishman now went up to Lucien, as had been agreed. He untied his scarf and used it very skilfully. The lieutenant's left arm was so firmly secured to his body that it was impossible for him to make use of it. It was more difficult to bind up his right eye, so as to prevent him from seeing with it. But this was done at last by tying the handkerchief behind his ear. These last preparations would have seemed ridiculous to a spectator who did not understand their significance, but no one present seemed at all inclined to smile.

Saint-Privat, in his consternation, felt inclined to pull his hair.

"It is time, gentlemen," said Sir Archibald. "Have you anything more to say?"

"No," replied the major.

"I might remark," said Lucien, "that the chances are now against me, as my antagonist, who was wounded a month ago, has had time to accustom himself to the eye and arm that remain to him, whereas I am neither one-eyed nor one-armed; however, I will not speak of such a trifle."

"Then get in, gentlemen," said the Englishman. "The major, who has the choice of seats, will get in first. Lieutenant Bellefond will follow. I will then take the reins, and the duel can begin as soon as the horses start. The two seconds must place themselves at the doors and proceed with us on foot."

This arrangement did not cause any demur, and everything was soon effected. The Prussian installed himself upon the back seat and Lucien in front of him.

"Come here and take this place," said the Englishman to Saint-Privat, bringing him to the side of the coach, where he had just raised the steps and closed the door.

"I? Never!" exclaimed the old man.

"What do you mean? Would you now refuse to help your fellow-countryman?"

"I refuse to be a party to a murder; and this is one."

"You should have thought of that before, sir. It is too late to draw back now. If you refuse, and persist in refusing, I shall go over there under those trees and fetch a sergeant to take your place, and also two soldiers, who will take you to the guard-house, where you will spend the night."

"To the guard-house!" repeated Saint-Privat; "no, no, I had rather go with you; but I protest against it, all the same."

What he was especially afraid of was that he might be searched at the guard-house by the foreign soldiers, and that the paper given him by Lucien might be taken from him—that paper on which his last hope now depended. He therefore obeyed, and placed himself near the door on the left. The fat Englishman went to the opposite side, while his companion climbed on to the coach-box and gathered up the reins. He lightly whipped up the two horses, who started off at a walk. This was the signal agreed upon to tell the two adversaries that they might fall upon one another. This stroke with the whip was like the usual “Proceed, gentlemen!” spoken by one of the seconds at a duel with swords. But it was not followed by the ringing sound of clashing steel. Indeed, not a sound came from the coach, and yet the struggle had begun. It was silent and terrible. The unfortunate Saint-Privat, condemned to walk along by the door on the left, went stumbling onward, and scarcely dared to raise his eyes. His clear mind availed him nought now that fate had settled the matter, and that nothing but a miracle could save the life of the colonel's heir. However, he did all that he could to control himself; for whatever might happen, whatever might be the result of the tragedy being enacted in the coach, the man of the dark room would soon need all his self-possession.

If the Prussian were killed, Saint-Privat might be seriously compromised in this affair, which was so like a murder, and he would, perhaps, be arrested. And with his antecedents this would be more dangerous for him than for a harmless citizen. He was not favourably looked upon by the head of the police; and the government which had entered into power within the last few days would never forgive him for having unsealed the letters of its partisans for the purpose of serving the usurper. If, on the contrary, Lucien were killed, what should he, Saint-Privat, do with his body? To leave it behind, and present himself on the following day at the place named on the paper, would be exposing himself to be accused of his murder. How could he raise the question of sharing the inheritance of a man picked up in the street with knife wounds all over his body, without being exposed to the most serious suspicions?

Saint-Privat foresaw these equally unfavourable chances, and did not fail to look them in the face. He said to himself that if the death of the Prussian took place, he could appeal to the Englishmen, who would, no doubt, make it a point of honour to defend a Frenchman compromised by themselves. If Lucien were killed, he might also, if necessary, call upon the foreign officers to testify in his favour.

● So his situation was not so desperate as he had feared a few moments before. He held a paper, the validity of which might perhaps be contested; but he might derive some benefit from it if the legatee would only understand his interests in the right way.

However, all this did not prevent him from earnestly hoping that the survivor might be the lieutenant, for with the latter he had now

virtually come to an understanding. He listened anxiously to what was going on in the coach, and soon summoned enough courage to look up, but he saw nothing. He was not tall enough to look in at the door window, unless he rose on tiptoe; and besides, it was so dark that he could not have seen into the coach even if he had done so.

The vehicle went on slowly round the Place, the two old mares proceeding at a walk, and Saint-Privat mentally cursed the driver. It depended upon the latter to shorten the frightful *tête-à-tête*, as it had been agreed that it should cease as soon as he had gone round the Place. Thus it would suffice for him to whip up his horses; but he was making them go slowly. Firm, stiff, and upright, with the reins in his left hand and the whip against his right thigh, the impassible officer looked as though he had been driving one of King George the Third's coaches at a state ceremony.

"And my fortune depends upon the way in which that long-legged fellow manages his horses!" thought Saint-Privat. "If the journey lasts five minutes, my officer may, perhaps, escape; but if it takes twenty minutes to go round the Place, both of them will be dead when the thing is over."

The Englishman had turned to the left by this time, and had first to pass by the Tuileries, then the bridge, and finally the Avenue des Champs Elysées to return to the corner of the Rue Royale, whence he had started. Saint-Privat lingered slightly, while the coach passed by the balustrade of the first moat. He wished to know what the stout Englishman was doing, the man who was the Prussian's second, and he saw him walking heavily along near the opposite side of the vehicle, already out of breath, although the coach moved but slowly. "That fellow cannot hold out," muttered Saint-Privat to himself, "and that will be too bad, for we need him, and we shall have to wait for him. I have no luck at all, I see. I found my heir after looking for him during a week, and I find him to be a hot-headed fellow, who at once agrees to fight a duel which would scandalise even a cannibal."

Saint-Privat's reflections were at this moment interrupted by a hoarse cry—a cry of agony coming from inside the coach. It was evident that one of the two foes had been seriously, if not mortally, wounded. But which one was it?

Saint-Privat soon thought that so hoarse a cry could only come from a German throat, and he began to hope a little. In order to be the more sure of the Prussian's defeat, he went quickly up to the door of the coach, and was tempted for a moment to clutch hold of the handle and climb up and look in. But he remembered that knives do not respect any one, and that if the fight were not over he might get a thrust in the face that was not meant for him. He therefore abstained from carrying out his idea, and this was probably fortunate for him, for he soon heard a stamping of feet within which proved that the fight was by no means over. At last they reached

the bridge. But half the ghastly journey was over. "They have time enough yet to cut one another into pieces," sadly thought the ex-director of the dark room.

Then came a fresh spell of silence. The two antagonists were now undoubtedly pausing before beginning again; drawing breath ere they threw themselves upon one another once more. The calm that presages a storm lasted till the coach had passed the entrance of the Avenue des Champs Elysées. Then the coach began to shake. There was a sound of muttered curses, then furious vociferations, then a sharp cry, a kind of death-rattle, as it seemed, and finally a profound and deathlike silence.

"It is all over now," thought Saint-Privat. "At least one of them is dead, if they are not both so."

And he began to listen again as he walked on, but he heard nothing save the loud breathing of the fat Englishman, who was slowly dragging himself along on the opposite side of the coach. As for the officer upon the seat, he did not stir. He did not seem to know anything of what was going on behind him; and any one who chanced to see him thus perched up on the box in full uniform, and driving a couple of worn-out horses, would have been tempted to think that he was carrying out some eccentric bet such as Englishmen indulge in.

Saint-Privat was not disposed, however, to see the humorous side of the thing. The now silent coach seemed to him a moving sepulchre, in which his dearest hopes were for ever buried. For he had no further illusions as to the result of the battle. He thought that it was surely Lucien who had uttered the last cry.

The voice had seemed too young and clear to be that of the old German major, whose voice resembled the barking of a dog. He would not long remain in uncertainty, however, for the journey's end was near. They had reached the fourth moat, and had only to cross the Rue Royale to reach the spot whence they had started.

This took three minutes more—three minutes which to Saint-Privat seemed interminable. However, the red-coated driver finally guided his horses to the side of the street. Then he stopped them, gathered up the reins, laid aside the whip, and alighted. The other Englishman was waiting for him, leaning against the shoulder of one of the horses, and much more out of breath than the animal itself.

They immediately began a very animated conversation in a language which Saint-Privat did not understand, and at last the tall islander, Sir Archibald, said in French: "Come, sir, you must see the result of this duel as well as we."

"It must be a fine sight," muttered the reluctant witness. "They must have attacked one another like a pair of wolves, and left nothing but fragments."

Without troubling himself about these remarks, Sir Archibald, followed by his companion, reached the door with one stride and opened it. Nothing was stirring in the coach, nor was there a groan

to be heard. The Englishman called the major by his name, but there was no reply. Then Saint-Privat called out to Lucien Bellefond. There was the same silence. "I knew very well that they were both dead," said he, in a lamentable tone.

"We must see," said the English officer, coolly. And he took one of the coach lamps and began to look inside.

His comrade had gone to the other side and opened the opposite door. Saint-Privat remained with the tall man, and protruded his head when the lamp was thrust into the coach. The horror of the sight surpassed his apprehensions. The two adversaries lay side by side, in a pool of blood, between the two seats. The Prussian was undermost. His face, which was frightfully distorted, was visible beneath the arm of his enemy, whose knife had pierced his throat. His single eye, which remained open, was already glassy, and it seemed to gaze up at Saint-Privat, who recoiled with horror, although he was far from sensitive by nature.

"He is dead, is he not?" said the Englishman.

"Your major, do you mean? Yes, as dead as a man can be; he must have been killed at once; but it is the other one I wish to see."

"The other? The Frenchman?" snorted the fat man, who was looking in at the opposite door; "ah! he is still breathing."

These words made Saint-Privat feel as much delight as surprise. He took the coach lamp from the tall man, who, despite his bravery, now seemed to shrink from examining the sight, and turned the light upon Mademoiselle Vernède's unfortunate lover. Lucien lay upon his back, and his eyes were closed. The blood was flowing from five or six wounds on his face, neck, arms, and breast. The struggle had been a terrible one. It might even be conjectured, from the position of the bodies, that Lucien had allowed himself to be struck several times while attempting to kill the Prussian with a single blow. He had succeeded, for his knife had remained up to the hilt in the German's clavicle. However, this victory had been paid for, if not with life, at all events very dearly, for Lucien scarcely breathed, and the movement seen by the Englishman was but a convulsive trembling like that of a dying man.

"He isn't dead, but he is not far from it," said Saint-Privat piteously, his hopes again growing faint. And he added, addressing the thin Englishman: "What shall we do now?"

"You must remain here while I go to the Highlanders' camp yonder, and bring four soldiers here."

"Soldiers! But you promised that I should not be molested, sir; you said so to my poor friend who lies there weltering in his blood, and——"

"I always do as I say," said the red-coat, "and you are speaking needlessly. I have no thought of having you arrested. I am going to call my men to take away Major von Gruner's body. It is not proper that an officer in the service of the King of Prussia should be

left in a cab. Besides, he has a large sum of money about him, and might be plundered."

"Accept my excuses, sir," exclaimed Saint-Privat. "I humbly apologise. I am entirely of your opinion. A brave officer of the allied army must not be robbed and insulted after death; for, unfortunately, he is dead, and my countryman is not much better off; at least I fear so."

Saint-Privat, who had gone on talking thus with his face still turned towards the coach, now looked round, and saw that the Englishman had already gone off towards the Avenue des Champs Elysées, where he presently heard him shouting out, whereupon the sentinel replied.

The dark-room official found himself alone with the other Englishman, who had seated himself upon a mile-stone, and did not speak. No one else was near at hand save the dead man and the dying one. The situation was far from pleasant, and it was also embarrassing. However, Saint-Privat was a man who knew how to act on such occasions. He had at first been puzzled by the strangeness of the affair in which he had been so unexpectedly called upon to take part, and he had appeared very stupid throughout. But now that he found that matters had turned out almost as he had foreseen, he became calmer, and thought of a means of getting out of this scrape.

The Prussian's body would soon be taken away, and he—Saint-Privat—would have charge of Lucien, who was wounded in such a manner that he might at any moment expire. What should he do? That was his present thought. The most important and urgent matter was to save the life of the colonel's heir if that were still possible. He could not leave him where he was, and a physician must be found at once, for every moment increased the danger. How to find one was the question. Where could he discover a doctor at such an hour; and if he did, how could the doctor be induced to come to the Place Louis XV. to attend upon a wounded man who had been stabbed in a coach? This would be revealing the duel to a stranger, and making the name of the wounded man known, as well as other details which Saint-Privat wished to keep to himself.

On the other hand, he could not think of taking the lieutenant home, as he did not know where he lived. To take him to the address written upon the note in pencil was unadvisable, for he—Saint-Privat—wished to have full liberty of action as regards Lucien. His own little lodgings in the Rue des Moineaux were ill suited to receive a wounded man. What remarks would be made in the neighbourhood, where he had established such a high reputation as a quiet and peaceable man! He then thought of another course, which was not without its drawbacks, but in which there were some advantages; and this idea was taking hold upon him, when he heard some heavy footsteps and a tipsy man singing. He turned quickly

round, and saw a person who was staggering along, and whom he immediately recognised.

"Here I am, sir!" exclaimed the fellow, as soon as he was within hearing. "The hour's up, and it appears that the grey mare didn't kick, as I see her standing quietly over there."

"This scoundrel can scarcely walk, and won't know what he is doing nor where he is going," muttered Saint-Privat. "I may be able to turn him to account."

"Where must I take you now?" asked the fellow. "Where's the Englishman?"

"Keep quiet!" said Saint-Privat, sternly. "Don't stir, but hold your tongue, and wait here. I want you, and I will pay you well."

The coachman obeyed, and leant against the grey mare, whom he caressed with an affection due to too great a supply of Argenteuil wine. It was at this moment that the heavy tread of the Highlanders was heard. They came up with a stretcher, and the officer was at their head. When they reached the coach they proceeded methodically.

The stretcher was placed upon the sidewalk, and the squad stood in a military attitude, to await the orders of the captain, who spoke a few brief words. "I have told them to place your friend upon the seat in the coach. You will take charge of him, I suppose?" he added, turning to Saint-Privat.

"Yes, sir," replied the old man at once. "But before taking leave of you, allow me to thank you for your courtesy, and to ask you to whom I ought to have the honour of applying, if I am annoyed as regards this duel."

"You must apply to Sir Archibald M'Kelly, captain in the Coldstream Guards of His Majesty the King of England," replied the islander.

The soldiers had now taken the major's body from the coach. They laid it on the stretcher, took up the latter, and then turned toward their bivouac, and all as quietly as though they had been carrying bread to their company.

"Good-day, sir," said the officers to Saint-Privat, who bowed to the ground. "Good-day, and we trust that your friend may recover."

"Aha!" said the coachman, pointing to the body on the stretcher, "it seems that one of the party has been drinking a little too much. Just like me, but I carry it better than he does."

"The brute thinks that the dead man is drunk," muttered Saint-Privat; "he is certainly in no condition to remember anything when to-morrow comes. That suits me exactly, and the best thing that I can do is to take the colonel's heir to the house in the Rue d'Enfer."

V.

SAINT-PRIVAT, ever prudent, was sometimes a long while in making up his mind, but when he did so he never tarried. "Come," he called out to the driver, "get on to your seat, if you can, and try to drive me without upsetting me."

"Without upsetting you? No danger, sir. I can take eight pints and drive as straight as an arrow, and as I've had but five, you may be quite easy. Is it by the hour or the trip?"

"By the trip. But don't go too fast, and try to avoid jolting. My friend inside is ill."

"Another one who's had too much, eh? You did not lose your time with the Englishmen, it seems. But, I say, where did you find anything to drink in such an out-of-the-way place as this? I never saw a tavern round here, and yet I know the place, as I drive by here four or five times a day."

Saint-Privat was about to curtail this drunken talk, but he reflected a moment and let the man talk on. He was not sorry that he should indulge in these absurd suppositions, and did not contradict the idea that the wounded man was intoxicated. "Ah! I see!" exclaimed the driver, suddenly. "The English always have a couple of bottles of rum in their pockets. Your friend must have made a bet that he could drink more than the other fellow whom they took away on the stretcher. And so they're both down! Bah! it's nothing; they'll get over it!"

"You guess everything, I see," said Saint-Privat. "Well, as you've guessed it all, take us away, my man, and be careful, for my poor friend is very ill."

"Be easy, sir; I'll take you along very gently. A soldier—your friend looks like a soldier in civilian clothes—is sacred even if he is tipsy."

As he thus rambled on, the coachman lifted the skirts of his coat so as to climb on to the box more conveniently. "Ah!" here's a pretty business!" he suddenly exclaimed. "The Englishman has taken away my whip."

"Your whip is on the box. Get up and have done with all this!" called out Saint-Privat, whose patience was at an end.

He was longing to go to Lucien, but, on the other hand, he wished to prevent the coachman from coming too near the door.

"If the whip's there it's all right. Where shall I take you?"

"To the Rue d'Enfer; I will show you the house when we get there."

"Very well. I'll take you slowly, but it won't require more than twenty-five minutes."

Saint-Privat let him get up, and when he saw him gather the reins in his hand, he ran to the door and leaped in, whereupon the coach started off.

The lieutenant had not stirred from the cushions upon which the soldiers had laid him on his back, and he was breathing so feebly that his far from disinterested protector at first thought that life had left his frame. It was with real fear that, after seating himself upon the opposite side, he put his hand to Lucien's heart. He found, that it still beat—irregularly, it is true; however, life was not yet extinct.

Saint-Privat then drew himself up, and assumed such a position as to support the body, for fear that the jolting of the coach might make it fall. There was not light enough for him to examine the wounds, but he saw that his own hand became bloody as soon as he touched Lucien.

At the first movement that he made with his feet he found that they rested upon a bloody rug; moreover, the bottom of the coach was as full of blood as a slaughter-house.

"When I think," muttered Saint-Privat, "that if a patrol stops this coach before we reach the house, I shall be taken before a commissary of the police, who will find that I am bloody from head to foot, and who will accuse me of having killed the lieutenant, supposing he should expire without returning to consciousness. Ah! I have had persons arrested and sentenced against whom there was much less proof of guilt. And I need not look for any mercy. A former agent of the 'usurper' would be a good catch, and they would hang me on the mere strength of my antecedents."

At this thought Saint-Privat could not help shuddering, although he was naturally firm. "Fortunately the drive will not last long," he said to himself. "Now let me think what I shall do when I get to the house. The important point is to prevent that driver from knowing the house again. I will make him stop a few yards from it. He is very drunk, and won't read the number. Besides, it is too dark for him to see it. I will wake up Bourdache. He is still strong, and between us both we shall be able to take the wounded man in. Then I'll pay the driver well, send him away, and he'll suspect nothing. But then, to-morrow, when he finds his coach full of blood, his memory may return to him. Bah! memory never returns completely to drunkards. He will have a vague remembrance of the Place Louis XV., and what happened there, and will tell some senseless story that no one will believe. Besides, he will talk of the foreign officers, and the police will at once think that there has been a duel between a couple of our worthy allies. And if the affair reaches the Minister of Police—I know Fouché thoroughly, he wishes to conciliate our enemies, and will hush the thing up. Good! but then that Prussian seemed to me to be some important

personage, and he won't reappear. What if his king, who will arrive here to-morrow, should take up the matter on his account? Well, in that case, the two Englishmen will come forward. They promised to do so, and I believe that they are men of their word. Besides, the allies have no interest in revealing anything that would show that they are disliked in Paris. No; no danger of the affair being followed up. I know all about such things, and I am certain that it will not be looked into."

He was aroused from his reflections by a deep sigh which escaped Lucien, and he remembered somewhat tardily that he would have done better to busy himself with the wounded man than to think of the consequences of the duel. He bent over him, called him by his name, and began to chafe his hands. It did no good, however, for the lieutenant was not the sort of man to be revived by the same means as a hysterical woman. It is true that Saint-Privat had no other means available, and he knew very little about fainting-fits.

"He will die on the road," he thought, in agony. "And even if he doesn't, how can I take care of him over there? If I send for a doctor the whole neighbourhood will know to-morrow that a man, who had been stabbed all over, has been taken to the house of the ladies in the Rue d'Enfer. What if he dies in the house? What an excitement would follow! The police and the authorities would come to my quiet place. My daughter would be compromised—I had not thought of all that!"

And then the good old man once more forgot his wounded companion to think of his own interests. He was perhaps tempted to stop the coach and put the poor young fellow down in the street. But a million deserved more attention than that, and after further thought, Saint-Privat said to himself: "Bah! he won't die. Bonaparte's soldiers are always tough, and he is young and strong. Besides, if one thought of all the bad chances against one, nobody would ever struggle on, and nobody would ever win anything. I can do very well without a doctor for him. Madame Boutard was a nurse once upon a time, and she will take care of him. If he is to recover, he will recover with her care."

Somewhat comforted by this thought, he now began to do what he could for his unfortunate charge. He raised the cushions of the coach so as to rest Lucien's head on them, and the latter breathed more freely, especially when Saint-Privat had also bound up a bad wound in his shoulder with his handkerchief. The blood had been flowing freely.

He was now near his journey's end, for the coach was turning into the Rue d'Enfer. The driver had not spoken falsely when he had said that he could drive very well in spite of the wine he had drunk. He had indeed driven very carefully. When he had gone more than half-way along the street, his passenger called out to him to stop near a high wall above which some large trees were visible.

The driver obeyed, although he did not see any door there, and his fare sprang to the ground, and said: "Wait for me here a moment. I am going for help to carry my companion indoors, and I will leave him in your care."

"How is the poor, dear man?" asked the driver, taking a tender interest in a person who, he thought, shared his own weakness for wine.

"He is better, and I shall not be away long," called out Saint-Privat. "But don't leave your seat on any account."

Then he hurried off, and the coachman remained alone.

The latter had no desire to leave his box, where he sat upright from force of habit; however, he would have had a good deal of trouble to get up again had he come down. The night was dark and the street entirely deserted. The only lantern, which hung by a rope above the sidewalk, gave only a faint light, and the drunken driver would not have been able, even if he had been sober, to see where his customer went. However, he did not trouble himself about that, and was already half asleep when Saint-Privat reappeared with an individual who was carrying a kind of folding iron bed. They walked along cautiously, looking around to see whether any one was observing them. When they were sure that no passer-by was at hand, they placed the bed near the coach. Saint-Privat opened the door noiselessly, while the other went into the coach, and soon reappeared with the wounded man in his arms, and laid him gently upon the bed. Then they both raised the bed and carried it to some distance from the coach to a recess in the wall, where it was out of sight. The coachman had not seen them do this, but Saint-Privat now returned and woke him up by pulling his coat. "It is all arranged," said he, "my friend is in the house, and I am going to give him some hot drink."

"Put some borage in it, sir," said the driver. "That's excellent when any one has been drinking too much."

"Here are ten francs for your trouble. It is not necessary to stay any longer. I shall not need you again."

"Thank you, sir. It is not as much as the Englishman gave me, but it is quite enough; and besides, you are French, and so am I. One's country above all things. Long live France!—come on, grey mare! come on!" A cut with the whip ended this incoherent outburst, and the horses started off. The coach was soon lost sight of in the darkness. When Saint-Privat saw it turn out of the street he ran to his assistant, who had mounted guard near the bed. "No one has passed?" said he.

"No one, sir," replied the man. "We can go in without fear of waking the neighbours."

The master took the folding-bed at one side, while the servant took it up at the other, and they went rapidly towards an arched doorway in the wall of a two-storey house near by. This doorway was open, and they placed their burden in a wide vestibule, where a woman with a lamp in her hand was waiting for them.

"Shut the door and bolt it, Bourdache," said Saint-Privat.

"All right, sir!"

"Good! Now, Carrots, tell me where we had best place this young man."

"Will he be here long?" asked the woman who replied to the nickname of "Carrots"—a tall creature of forty, who did not seem at all surprised at the sight of a man covered with blood and lying upon the bed which had just been brought in.

"A month or two, perhaps. He will not leave till he is quite well."

"Then there's the pavilion at the end of the garden; but Mademoiselle Clarisse takes her drawing-lessons there."

"She must take them somewhere else, then, or stop taking them for the present. Let us go there. Help your husband and carry the wounded man between you."

The couple obeyed at once, and Saint-Privat, provided with a lamp, went ahead down a large garden, the wall of which fronted the street. This garden was evidently never attended to, for the paths were not raked, and the flower-beds were hidden by thistles and brambles. The trees, which were never pruned, spread about in every direction, and the birds made their nests there in peace. The groves, which had once been laid-out in a primitive style, had assumed much the aspect of a virgin forest, and afforded a thick shade, although they were so irregular in form. The eyes of inquisitive neighbours could not peer through the branches, and it was always cool there. The place was like an oasis in the midst of Paris, a peaceful and impenetrable retreat, which the old spy must have greatly appreciated.

The pavilion was at the end of the grounds and seemed a snug retreat. It was a little house built in the rococo style of the eighteenth century, and very odd in appearance; its front was strangely designed, its chimneys oddly formed, and its windows ornamented with medallions. Unfortunately, time and the Revolution had passed over the place, and it was now almost a ruin. Some of the windows had no panes, and the doors did not close properly. Still it was habitable, especially in the summer, and a sick man could enjoy perfect rest there, for not a sound was to be heard from without.

"Are there any chairs there? Is there a bed?" asked Saint-Privat as he went in.

"There's everything necessary, master," said the Bourdache couple in one breath.

"You know that you had a room furnished there last year when Mademoiselle Clarisse came home from the convent," added the woman whom her master had called Carrots. "You wanted to put an English governess there."

"True. I had forgotten that; and it will do very well. My young man will be quite comfortable there."

After crossing a room full of easels, cartoons, and plaster busts,

Mademoiselle Clarisse's studio—Saint-Privat, followed by the two servants, opened a door which communicated with a somewhat small but neatly furnished room. There were curtains to the windows and the bed, and these were of white muslin, as if the place had been intended for a girl's accommodation. The bed on which the wounded man lay was set down for a moment in one corner, for there were only some blankets and mattresses upon the other bed, and Carrots at once began to look for some sheets in a chest of drawers.

"Now, Bourdache," said Saint-Privat, "go and call Madame Boutard, and be sure that you do not wake my daughter."

"Don't be alarmed, sir. Madame Boutard is not in bed, and Mademoiselle Clarisse won't hear a sound."

While waiting for the person whom he had sent for, Lucien's second began to walk up and down, gesticulating and talking to himself, and stopping every instant to look at the wounded man's pale face. The condition of the unfortunate lieutenant did not seem to have improved. He breathed as painfully as before, and the only sign of life he gave was a convulsive starting. The blood continued to ooze from the wounds made by the Prussian's knife, and it fell upon the bed and upon the floor.

Carrots did not seem to be alarmed by this sight, in fact, she looked as though she was used to it. Nor had her husband shown any surprise when Saint-Privat had fetched him to carry the dying man into the house. He had done so without a word, and as though he had been doing nothing else ever since his birth.

However, Saint-Privat, who was evidently the master of the mysterious house, had no appearance of being a brigand. The inhabitants of the Rue des Moineaux, where he had his official abode, could have testified to the fact that no one in that neighbourhood was more honest and steady. It is true that they did not know that their worthy neighbour was the owner, or, at all events, the tenant of a house in the neighbourhood of the Luxembourg, and their amazement would have been great had they seen the man, who appeared to live so unostentatiously in his little rooms, directing two servants who seemed to be as silent and assiduous as a couple of slaves. This inexplicable scene would have set them talking for six months.

In about five minutes Bourdache returned, followed by a woman who, in spite of the care she took of her person, was evidently nearly fifty.

"Come here, Julie," said Saint-Privat ; "look at this young man, and tell me if you think he will survive."

Madame Boutard, who answered to the pretty name of Julie, did not express any surprise at sight of the bloody body, but without a word she went up to the folding bed. Her face was a peculiar one. Her hair was turning grey, and was carefully curled in short, little ringlets. She looked like a duenna. She had large, regular features, very bright, grey eyes, a full figure, a queenly carriage, and an air, which was at once discreet and respectable. It was evident that she

had been very handsome when young, and that she did not even now think herself unpleasing. She was dressed after the fashion popular under the Directory, but had found a way of making that fashion decent by certain modifications. She looked like a "Merveilleuse" of Barras's time, with a touch of the nun about her. She had a bunch of keys at her belt, and a gold eye-glass. Saint-Privat, who undoubtedly knew her well, looked at her with more impatience than surprise, and seemed annoyed to find that she showed no haste whatever in replying, but came very slowly forward.

"In the first place," said he, "can you judge of his condition and of the seriousness of his wounds? I must know at once, and if you cannot tell me exactly, I think that I had better send for a surgeon, although I do not like to do so."

"You know very well," replied Madame Boutard, with an offended air, "or you ought to know, that I managed the ambulance of the section of the Butte des Moulins after the affair of the 13th Vendémiaire. It is idle to tell a surgeon about this business."

"It would be dangerous, and I greatly prefer not to do so. But begin your examination, and make haste. Serious matters depend upon what you may say."

The reason for all this discourse was that Saint-Privat had reflected since leaving the coach. He said to himself that if Lucien had only a few minutes or a few hours to live, it would be useless to encumber himself with his body. The death of the heir would be a misfortune which he should greatly regret, but it would be idle to increase that misfortune by exposing himself to the law. He had consequently resolved to have the wounded man carried away by the Bourdache couple, and laid in some waste near the avenue of the Observatoire, supposing the practitioner in petticoats said that he would not live. The hour and the neighbourhood made such a thing practicable, for no one would meet the bearers of the body.

Saint-Privat already mourned over this cruel necessity, but he knew very well how to control his agitation when necessary, and he thought that it would not do to defer the execution of his project any longer. If Lucien was to die, he must rid himself of the body. It would be best to do so at once, if it were sure that he would not revive, or at least return to consciousness. Precautions must be taken.

"I say, sir," now whispered Bourdache in his employer's ear, "there were some traces of blood in the street; I took a pail of water and washed them all away."

"That was right! You think of everything. It is easy to see that you have been well trained," answered his master, with an encouraging look.

"By you, sir; nobody can teach anything better than you can."

Meantime the respectable Madame Boutard, having put on a linen apron, which Carrots handed out from a drawer, knelt composedly beside the folding bed, and made her examination as coolly

as any army-surgeon would have done. The lamp upon a side-table lighted up the motionless form of the wounded man. The woman examined his face, on which there were two or three slight cuts; then his neck, which was also wounded.

She did this skilfully, and, if not quite as well as a sister of charity would have done, at all events as dexterously as ordinary nurses do. Madame Boutard had certainly done good service at the bedside of the wounded, after the firing directed by Bonaparte against the insurgents when they were driven back upon the steps of Saint-Roch's church.

"Well?" said Saint-Privat, who was looking on anxiously.

"I find nothing as yet but mere scratches, but I have not finished," replied the lady, quietly.

And she began to examine the arms, which were literally hacked. Even the left arm; which had been tied to Lucien's body, had not been spared; however, it had warded off a blow aimed at the heart. Madame Boutard did not inquire as to why this arm had been tied up. She merely untied the scarf, and soon saw that, although the wounds were deep, no important artery was bleeding.

The trunk remained, and here two deep wounds were bleeding still, one being below the clavicle, the other above the ribs. The nurse carefully opened Lucien's long coat, tore the shirt apart, uncovered the young officer's chest, and washed the wounds with a wet cloth. After this, she sounded them with her finger, and applied her ear to his heart and chest to listen.

"The air does not come through," said she, after a careful auscultation. "The two wounds have only grazed a bone."

"What do you conclude from that?" demanded Saint-Privat eagerly.

"That he will live."

"You answer for it?"

"Yes, certainly."

"And do you think that you can cure him without a doctor?"

"I am sure of it."

"Ah! at last!" exclaimed the ex-director of the dark room. "I can hope still! Julie, my good Julie, you have taken a great load off my mind; ah! if only you knew it."

Any other woman would have wished to know why, but Julie was as discreet as a seraglio mute. "Now," resumed her master, "tell me, will he be long ill?"

"It depends upon his strength and his constitution, which seems to be robust. He is a very finely made man, and a handsome fellow, too!" added Madame Boutard.

"True," assented Saint-Privat, now quite encouraged. "Put him to bed," he added, addressing Bourdache and his wife, who immediately began to undress the sufferer, and prepared to lay him upon the bed, which Carrots had previously arranged.

Then, pulling Julie by the sleeve, he drew her into the adjoining

room, and thence to the garden. When they were there, quite alone in a dark grove, he said: "My dear friend, Clarisse's fortune, yours, and mine depend upon you."

"You mean that I must save this young man? Well, I will save him," replied the lady, with majestic simplicity.

"I rely upon you, and I promise to reward you for your services properly. Listen to me. You must let Carrots remain at your patient's bedside. She must not leave him day or night, and must call you if there is the slightest appearance of danger. I do not need to tell you to give him every care, and not to let any one know of his presence here. The necessary medicine must be purchased by Bourdache at a chemist's some distance away, so as to avoid any remarks of the apothecary in the neighbourhood."

"Very well. Is there anything else?"

"No, not now; but I will be here early in the morning, and we will have another chat. I shall come every day at the usual hour, and as soon as the young fellow is able to talk, I shall sit beside him, and remain here with him. I leave him to you for to-night, for I must go elsewhere. I am expecting important news. Ah, Julie! you do not know what I should have lost if the knife that wounded that young man had not slipped."

"He may revive while you are away," said Madame Boutard. "If he asks where he is, what shall I say?"

"Tell him that he is with friends, but do not mention any names. Keep back all you can."

"That will be easy, for it is not likely that he will ask any urgent questions at present. He has lost a great deal of blood, and is very weak."

"Take good care of him, my dear friend. I must go now, for it is very late, and——"

"One more question."

"Make haste then."

"You know that your daughter goes every morning to the studio to draw from those casts. If she asks me why the pavilion is shut up, what shall I say?"

"The deuce!" muttered Saint-Privat. "I had not thought of that."

"You must think of it," said Madame Boutard, quietly; "you know as well as I do that Clarisse is naturally inquisitive, and that there is no keeping anything from her."

"You must concoct some story; you must say that one of my friends has met with an accident."

"She knows that you have no friends; you have told her so a hundred times."

"Well, say that a passer-by, any one, has been run over—anything you can think of."

"But she will want to see the wounded man, and take care of him herself. She has always talked of being a Sister of Charity."

"You must tell her from me that she cannot see him; that it would be improper, as he is a young man."

"Do you really advise me to say that? Do you think that would be the way to restrain her? You don't know her, then? Your daughter is extremely romantic, and if she thinks that anything unusual has happened, neither you nor I could prevent her from rushing into it. That is the consequence of letting her read novels all day long."

"Well, she must do something, the dear child!"

"She might make her own dresses."

"Do you think that I want my daughter to be a dressmaker? Thank heaven, she has money enough to live without working, especially now that—— But no matter."

"Very well; but you have not yet told me what to do. You don't intend, I presume, to allow her to enter the pavilion while the young man is there?"

Saint-Privat this time made no haste to reply. It would seem as though this last question had opened new possibilities to his mind.

"My dear friend," said he, after a silence, "I have plenty of time to think of all that. I have already told you that I shall be here to-morrow morning. Clarisse won't get up in the night to go to draw in her studio."

"Get up? She has not yet gone to bed; or, if she has, she is not asleep. Look there!"

Saint-Privat raised his eyes, and saw that a light was burning in his daughter's room.

"It is true," said he. "Poor, dear child! what can she be thinking of?"

"Some hero of romance, you may be sure. It depends upon you to let her behold her ideal. That fine fellow there, who looks like an officer, would suit her exactly."

"You admire him, too, eh?"

"What do you mean?" asked Madame Boutard, in a tone of vexation.

"Don't be angry, and do not get nonsense into your head. I have a great deal to think of without troubling myself about all this folly. I know what I'm about, and you cannot teach me anything. Besides, to-morrow is not far off, and if Clarisse questions you to-night, tell her that I have forbidden you to say anything; but that she need not wait long, as I shall come in the morning and tell her everything myself."

"What! do you mean to let her know that there is a young man here?"

"You really annoy me! Clarisse is my daughter, and I shall tell her what I please. It only concerns me. Meantime, my dear friend, your cue is silence, and you must see that the wounded man has every attention he requires. I rely upon you. Good-night!"

Then, without troubling himself any further about the governess, Saint-Privat turned away, going slowly across the garden, which was familiar to him, reached the vestibule, opened the door, and went down the Rue d'Enfer. He stepped along lightly, and rubbed his hands, like a man well pleased with himself and his fortunes. And he had, indeed, good cause to rejoice after such an experience. All had seemed lost, and now everything appeared to be favourable. The terrible adventure in which he had found himself engaged, in spite of his own wishes, had turned out in the most fortunate and unexpected manner.

Lucien was alive, and would not die. Madame Boutard answered for that; and that duel, that insane duel, which had menaced all his projects, now seemed to turn to his advantage. The wounded man was in his power, and could not escape him; for Saint-Privat had a strong hand of his own.

He was admirably served, was Saint-Privat, and all his retainers would have gone through fire and water for him. The secret of their devotion was simple enough. He had come across them in the course of his experiences as a police-agent and as director of the dark room. One day, seven or eight years before, chance had placed certain letters in his way which had proved to him that the Bourdache couple were involved in a pretty business, which was the poisoning of a husband who stood in their way.

"Carrots," in order to become the lawful companion of Bourdache, had got rid of her first husband by giving him some very unwholesome broth. Bourdache had provided the arsenic, and she had committed the imprudence of writing to him, saying that the attempt would be successful, and entering into details of a compromising character. She was then living at Versailles, and her lover in Paris, where he carried on various callings, which the police looked upon with so much suspicion that they had pointed out his correspondence to the "unsealing office."

Saint-Privat was looking at that time for two servants whom he might rely upon under all circumstances, and from whom he could exact anything. So, instead of giving the letter up to those who had the right of investigating the matter, he put it into his pocket, made careful inquiries, and found that these people would suit him exactly. The man was able-bodied and resolute, the woman intelligent and laborious. He had but a word to say to send them to the guillotine, but he promised them never to say it if they would become his slaves—under easy conditions, however, as he offered them a home and wages. The proposal was gratefully accepted. The two guilty creatures were married, and what happens less rarely than may be believed, they reformed, and even ended by feeling sincere remorse. Saint-Privat had previously met with natures like these, and had often come across them in the lowest ranks of life in Paris, and knew that he could rely upon the couple's entire devotion. He was not mistaken, and they served him with

absolute fanaticism. It is true that he had taken care to keep the accusing letter.

As for Madame Boutard, that was a different story.

The handsome Julie had begun her career during the Revolution, by appearing in a procession as the "Goddess of Liberty," and had changed her politics after the 9th Thermidor. She had even ended, little by little, by becoming so ardent a royalist, that in Nivose, of the year IX., she had been greatly compromised in the affair of the infernal machine. She had been intimately acquainted with Limoulan, one of the murderers, and had enabled him to escape. He had never been found. The worthy Saint-Privat had at that time been actively employed in Fouché's police, and had rendered important services; it was he who had discovered that she had criminal acquaintances. She would have been sent straightway to the scaffold if the charitable agent, who was already looking for persons to be his tools, had not undertaken to save her at the risk of seriously compromising himself.

For him to run the risk of shielding a person in such serious difficulties, his motives must have been strong indeed. This man, Fouché's tool, the ex-head of the dark room; this man, who had plied two equally vile avocations, and who despised humanity, entertained a deep and sincere affection for one person, and pursued one aim that was highly praiseworthy. He had spoken truly in telling his neighbours in the Rue des Moineaux that his wife was dead. She had formerly been an opera-dancer, and she had died in 1796, leaving him a little girl two years old. Unfortunately, he could not keep the child with him, and had been obliged to put her out at nurse. He was compelled to leave her with strangers for several years for want of means to bring her up, but after the 18th Brumaire, he attained a higher position in the police service, and for several fortunate arrests received very large rewards. Then he went to find little Clarisse at Montfermeil, where she was keeping cows, and sent her to a convent at Melun, where his means enabled him to pay for her board and have her brought up like a rich man's daughter. She was seven at that time, and did not leave school till she was twenty. The Empire had then just fallen, but Saint-Privat had become almost an important functionary, and had accumulated a little fortune by dint of toil and economy. In 1807 he had bought a house in the Rue d'Enfer, at a very low price, and had thoroughly repaired it, placing the Bourdache couple there as attendants, and Madame Boutard as a housekeeper. In thus preparing this hidden abode, far removed from his own, Saint-Privat had certain motives. The spy, who had become director of the dark-room, the poor subordinate detective, who had grown rich by plying his sorry trade, the man who had been Fouché's tool, loved nothing upon earth save his daughter. He had sworn that she should be happy, and to make her so he would have betrayed all the governments he had served; he would even have

committed murder ; although, with his extremely quiet nature, he disliked violence.

He had bestowed all his tenderness upon this young girl, all that his profession obliged him to hide in the depths of his heart ; for Saint-Privat had a heart, stern as he might seem, and one which it was difficult to reach—a heart that had grown hardened as to the sufferings of others and the great catastrophes of life, but which beat with paternal love. In marrying the dancer, who had become the mother of his child, he had not yielded to any infatuation ; he had simply wished to make a home of some sort for himself, and to settle down, as the phrase goes. He had not succeeded, for the ex-ballet girl of the Royal Academy of Music had not brought him any dowry whatever, nor even the spirit of economy, for she did not know how to manage anything, and when she died she left her husband poorer than when he married her. However, the husband, when left a widower after a few years of matrimony, had felt a new affection spring up within him. He had suddenly felt the love of a father for his child, and from that day forth lived only for his little Clarisse. He was then earning with difficulty a scanty pittance as a detective, and he said to himself that, to marry his darling daughter to advantage, he must attain to wealth and respect. He did not despair of making a fortune ; and, in fact, under the Consulate, at the time when he removed the child from her nurse's house, he had already amassed a tolerably large amount of money. It was more difficult, however, to leave his heiress an honoured, if not an honourable name.

Still he endeavoured to do so, and in order to prevent his own shame from injuring his daughter, he did not shrink from any sacrifice. The first, that which cost him the most, was parting with her when he sent her to the convent school and left her there till she was more than nineteen. He had sent her there under a false name, and had stated that he was a Parisian merchant, engrossed in business, and he had the courage to go and see her very seldom, for fear that his journeys to Melun might be remarked, and that the lady-superior of the convent might discover his real calling. He was fortunate enough to succeed in retaining this *incognito* for thirteen years, without incurring the slightest suspicion.

The good nuns who educated Clarisse never suspected that her father, the neat-looking and quiet man whom they received in the parlour four times a year, made it his business to spy upon conspirators, and, if heedful, to send them to the scaffold. On the other hand, the quiet inhabitants of the Rue des Moineaux did not dream that the worthy tenant of No. 17, the respectable widower who lived alone like an old bachelor, had a tall daughter whom he was having educated at eleven leagues from Paris, as expensively as though she had been intended for the wife of a millionaire. Clarisse loved her father dearly. He made her a great many presents, but she never thought of inquiring about his social position.

Everything went on marvellously well, and, in addition to good luck, Saint-Privat obtained the important and lucrative post of director of the dark room, besides making a great deal of money as a political agent. However, he was not a man to fold his hands in his prosperity; he had too much experience and foresight not to understand that this happy existence could only last for a time. Clarisse could not remain at the convent for ever, and when she left it he must give her the kind of life to satisfy her, without thwarting his own purposes. He still desired to conceal from his daughter the secrets which he had hidden from her when a school-girl, and to do this the first thing to arrange was that they should live apart.

He had made arrangements for a separate life for some time past. The Bourdache couple, who had charge of the house in the Rue d'Enfer, and who had been there since the year 1807, spread the report in the neighbourhood that their master, a rich shipowner of Havre, was coming to live in Paris with his daughter, when she had finished her education. They thus prepared the neighbours for the appearance of a young girl who would come to live in the house, and the neighbours had time to accustom themselves to that idea; so that when Clarisse appeared in the spring of 1814, her arrival made no sensation whatever in the vicinity of the Luxembourg. People expected, it is true, to see the father, the famous shipowner, but the Bourdaches said that he was dead, and had left his daughter to the care of the old gentleman who looked so venerable, and who came every day to see his ward; and they added that she had a governess besides. This was Madame Boutard.

Saint-Privat had kept her in reserve for this position ever since she had become the accomplice of the designers of the infernal machine. He wished to make her play the part of "companion" to the young girl, and thought her well suited to the post. In the first place, he was sure that she would not betray him as long as she was in his employ, and to secure the prolongation of his authority, he took good care, under the Empire, to employ Clarisse's future governess in political police-work, by which she was greatly compromised. This gave him a hold upon her, especially after the return of the Bourbons, and his power over her was almost as great as over the Bourdaches. Having studied the mind and disposition of his three retainers, he had the most entire faith in their devotion. He was served, in point of fact, with more zeal, intelligence, and discretion than the Emperor Napoleon had ever met with in those about him.

The sole heiress of Saint-Privat's little fortune had now lived for about a year in the house in the Rue d'Enfer, and everything was going on as the skilful plotter desired. Nothing went wrong, nothing was amiss in the conduct of the dependents placed about his daughter, nor was there a remark in the neighbourhood to his disadvantage. The household seemed to be perfection, and yet he who had thus arranged it all felt that it was time that Clarisse should

marry. He desired nothing more than that she *should* marry; but whom? That was the question. His dream was that she should marry a rich man, with a brilliant position, and go into society, where he had never set foot, and to arrive at that marvellous result she must have a splendid dowry.

Now, after twenty years' toil and saving, and the receipt of numerous "rewards," Saint-Privat had got some two hundred thousand francs to give to Clarisse, independently of the house in which she lived. Two hundred thousand francs would in those days have been a fortune for the daughter of an honest man; but it was not enough for the daughter of a detective. Saint-Privat was well aware of this, and this is why, after Napoleon's return from Elba, he made up his mind to resume the management of the dark room. He believed, however, that the re-appearance of Bonaparte would result in final disaster, and that the functionaries chosen on the 20th of March would again soon be removed; still it was not in order to save a part of his earnings that he had resumed the post which the Bourbons had taken from him. He intended to make use of his stay in the office to find out some secret which he might turn to good account. Something told him that Clarisse's dowry would come to him from the opening of the letters which might pass through his hands. And he was not mistaken, it would seem, for he had finally come upon Zenobia Capitaine's letter. It was high time he did so, for, as he had foreseen, he was dismissed from his post on the following day. However, this mattered little to him, as he was in possession of information which he valued at a million at the least, and he took his dismissal very coolly.

It is true that the days that followed had made many changes in his plans, and ended in a crisis of a startling character. Lucien's duel had almost destroyed Saint-Privat's hopes for ever, and that night, while he was hastening towards his house in the Rue des Moineaux, he had not yet recovered from the shock. He now feared nothing as to losing his dear lieutenant, his guarantee and hostage, as he called him in his own mind—for he had full confidence in Madame Boutard's opinion—but he began to see other difficulties. What the lady had said as to Clarisse, and the difficulty of preventing an acquaintance springing up between her and the wounded man, remained in his mind; and he was wondering how he could prevent it, and avoid such annoyances as might result from this almost inevitable intimacy, when all at once, while he was crossing the Pont-Neuf, an idea occurred to him. "Aha!" said he to himself, "why not? One million and one million make two millions. Clarisse has one, Lucien Bellefond has another—it would be a very suitable match." And a smile appeared upon his thin lips as he trotted along by the side of the parapet.

"Yes," he resumed aloud, "it is suitable; the lieutenant must be nearly thirty and Clarisse is twenty. He is evidently of a good family, as he had an uncle who was a colonel and a millionaire.

Besides, he is a bold fellow, quite capable of taking his wife into any society, even if persons turned up their noses at her. He is rich, brave, and respected—he is the son-in-law to suit me. He is handsome, besides, and just the man to please a woman. Julie, who knows all about it, says that he would suit Clairisse. Upon my word, things are going on splendidly, and it was a good idea of mine to take my wounded officer to the Rue d'Enfer!"

The old man smiled again, and rubbed his hands. This was his favourite gesture to express unbounded delight. However, his face became overclouded as he muttered: "He may please her, but what if she does not please him? Bah! it is impossible. Clairisse is charming. Yes, but that is not enough. In the first place, he does not look like a saint, and he may have some love-affairs somewhere else. Who knows whether the paper that he gave me was not a will to leave his fortune to some girl? I must look into all that. Besides," added the perplexed father, "he might like Clairisse without fancying me. All these officers are full of prejudices, and he told me to-night that my proposal to him was a 'pretty kind of business.' He took me for a spy, or something of that sort. So he would not be in any great haste to become my son-in-law, and if I relied upon his giving my daughter a good social position, I might reckon without my host, unless love should enter into the matter. Love is a great leveller, and if Clairisse turned this fine officer's head he would not need any coaxing to couple his million with my daughter's million. Upon my word, I don't believe I should risk anything in letting the young people see one another—and, besides, I can scarcely prevent it. My wounded man may be ill for weeks or months, and I cannot keep his presence unknown to Clairisse. I must think of it all."

At this point Saint-Privat smote his brow, exclaiming: "What a fool I am to trouble myself about all this when I have so much else to think of! Let the marriage go as it may. The main thing is the million, and that is not mine as yet. I have my hand on the heir, and I am sure he will not escape me; that is all very well, but it is not everything, or rather it is nothing, as long as I have not found the sutler-girl who has the will. I have the man, but not the woman. Where is she? That is the great point. And until I know, I shall not be a bit better off than if I had never found that lucky letter."

While the ex-director of the dark room was thus discoursing, his face grew darker, and he now looked gloomy enough as he turned from the Pont-Neuf on to the quay of the Louvre. But he was not long in coming to this wise conclusion, which he enunciated as he went past the gates of the Carrousel: "I must not put the cart before the horse. The officer is in a safe place, and cannot get away without my leave. I am therefore certain that the thing will not slip through my fingers. All I have to do now, while my wounded man is recovering, is to find Zenobia Capitaine."

Saint-Privat, who only talked to himself aloud when perplexed, did not speak again till he reached his lodgings. He had made up his mind, like the wise man that he was, and longed to resume the task which had been interrupted by his meeting with Lucien, and the strange adventure following upon it. Since the beginning of the week he had not lost a moment in following up the two clues that interested him—that leading to Lucien Bellefond, and that leading to the sutler-woman of the 19th Artillery Regiment. After many useless attempts, he had finally found Lucien. But he had been less fortunate in his other research, although he had not spared exertion.

Profiting by the leisure afforded him by his dismissal, he had not rested day or night, but had sought for Zenobia unceasingly, and unsuccessfully. He had, however, proceeded methodically instead of trusting to chance, as a novice would have done ; and, as he was a master in the art of tracking people, he had not spent his time foolishly. He had acted after careful and able study of the long letter he had surprised. He had gone every day to the coach office and inquired about the travellers who had arrived during the last two days by the Périgueux coach, and he had not hesitated to represent himself as an agent of the secret police, so as to question the director of the office, who had furnished him with all the information he possessed. The two last public coaches from Périgueux had brought but three women, one of them young, and accompanied by her husband and sister. None of them bore the slightest resemblance to a sutler-woman.

However, Saint-Privat, to satisfy himself on this point, went to inquire at the hotel where these two women had repaired, and soon learned that they belonged to a respectable Bergerac family.

The female third traveller gave him more trouble. The description might be that of Zenobia Capitaine ; but, unfortunately, she had not gone to a hotel, and the spy lost two days looking for her. He finally found her in an old house in the Rue Payenne, in the Marais, where she was staying with a cousin, a venerable wreck of the old magistracy. He was bitterly disappointed when he saw her. She was an old *émigrée* who had hastened to Paris on hearing of the downfall of the usurper, in order to beg that her property, which had been confiscated during the Revolution, might be restored to her by the lawful king.

The sutler-woman had nothing to do with anything of that sort. The indefatigable hunter now tried the mail coach, although this mode of transport was not usually resorted to by women. It was at that time a mere cabriolet, with few springs, and open to every wind. Saint-Privat learned from the courier that he had only brought a very young man, almost a child, to Paris. The lad had got in at a place near Périgueux, and had told him that he was going to Belgium to look for his father, a superior officer wounded at Waterloo. This was no clue, and Saint-Privat did not follow it up,

He then thought that Zenobia, who was evidently gifted with great prudence, might have taken an indirect road instead of coming by coach, as she had announced in the letter, in which she spoke of the precautions she must adopt to escape Lucien's competitors in the colonel's inheritance. It was quite possible that she had been cunning enough to leave the coach in the neighbourhood of Paris, which was now invested by the allies, and to pass the barrier in a chaise or on foot. He could not hope to find her very soon if that were the case.

His inquiries at the hotels and lodging-houses had taken him a long time, and he wished to proceed more rapidly. Accordingly he thought that it would be wisest to lay a trap for Zenobia. She had told the lieutenant that, not knowing where to go or where to meet him, she wished him to write her *poste restante*, making an appointment to meet her. Thus, as soon as she arrived, she would go to the Ministry of War to ask for Lucien Bellefond's address, and then to the Central Post Office to know whether her friend had replied.

He, Saint-Privat, must therefore keep a look-out at the Central Post Office, Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, and at the Ministry of War. As he had some devoted friends in the police, he now had recourse to them. He charged three former comrades, who had served with him under Fouché, to watch these points—one the War Ministry, one the coach office—so that if the sutler-woman came to Paris later than her letter had announced, she might be seen ; and a third was stationed at the post-office. Each of them promised to follow the sutler-woman if she appeared, and to find out where she went.

Saint-Privat then undertook to search the hotels, public places, and streets, where he hoped that his instinct as a spy would enable him to recognise Zenobia Capitaine. Unfortunately, nothing had resulted, so far. Every evening for an entire week he had returned home without finding her. Every evening, too, he opened his letter-box with a quickly-beating heart, and found only three bits of card inside with the words, "Nothing new." For his three agents had orders to write to him every day. A slit under the knocker of the door of the house in the Rue des Moineaux served them to slip the cards in, and Saint-Privat opened the door himself for the postman whenever the latter had an ordinary letter for him. The missives sent openly through the usual service were much fewer in number than the private communications, and the neighbours thought that the gentleman at Number 17 had but few acquaintances. He received mysterious communications, however, every night, and on his return from the Rue d'Enfer he was sure of finding something in his private letter-box. He even felt sure that good news awaited him.

Experience had taught him that in police affairs, as in the ordinary course of life, good luck never comes singly. He had caught Lucien, after great trouble, and he now thought he could keep him, and obtain what he wished from him. The beginning pro-

misadventure well, and Saint-Privat willingly allowed himself to hope that before the end of that lucky night some further piece of good fortune would befall him.

He hastened on. The events that had transpired on that memorable night had taken up a deal of time, however; and it was three in the morning when he turned into the labyrinth of narrow streets covering that hilly part of Paris then called the *Butte des Moulins*. Everybody was asleep in the neighbourhood, in spite of the proximity of the *Palais-Royal*, for daylight was beginning to dawn, and although the frequenters of the wooden galleries went to bed late they did not rise early. Clarisse's father met no one, and when he shut the door of the passage he at once looked into his letter-box. He found the three cards as usual, and one of them seemed to bear more writing than usual, at least so far as he could distinguish in the dim light.

He felt greatly agitated, and ran hastily upstairs to his rooms, which were three little square nooks, with grey paper on the walls and some walnut-wood furniture scattered about. He hastily lit a lamp, and then holding the card to the light, he read: "Some one came to-night to the post-office; but I could not follow the person on going out. I will tell you why."

"The fool!" exclaimed Saint-Privat, angrily. However, he read on: "No harm is done, as the person will return to-morrow. But I cannot keep on watching, for reasons which I will acquaint you with."

"Again!" growled the irascible old man. And he resumed: "To-morrow morning you must come in person when the office opens, and watch in my place. You can follow the person, who will go to the office early. But be careful to disguise yourself."

That was all. The other two cards, as usual, merely bore the words, "Nothing new."

"At last!" said the spy, "I have her. She must have gone to inquire for her letter. She was told, of course, that there was no letter for her, and she will return to-day. That is all right. Come, come! Father Saint-Privat knows what he is about, and the trap was a good one, although the bird has been so long in coming to it. I did well not to write, as I thought of doing at first. If Zenobia had found a letter for her, she would not have returned, and her track would be lost, as that fool Cornillon thought fit to let her go without following her." And he resumed after a moment's thought: "Why the deuce did he not follow her? He tells me that he will explain it to me. He ought to have explained it at once. But no; it was better not to put things in writing. Still, what does he mean by saying that I can follow 'the person,' and why does he wish me to disguise myself? Does Zenobia know him? Does he think that she will at once guess why I come? I cannot understand it. It is true that Cornillon does not know my purpose. He talks of following her, but I have not the least wish to do so. I

intend to go up to her boldly at the office, and tell her the little story that I have prepared. However, I shall know to-day what it all means. It is certain that I must be at the post-office as soon as it opens, and that is at eight o'clock. If I wish to disguise myself, I have no time to lose. Now, is it worth while taking so many precautions? The sutler will receive me just as well as I am as with a different face."

Here Saint-Privat sat down upon a chair, and began to reflect deeply. The laconic advice given by his confederate greatly puzzled him, and he vainly tried to understand it. "Bah!" he muttered at last, "Cornillon is no fool. I have worked with him, and I know that he understands how to proceed. I will, therefore, choose a disguise and retain it as long as I have any connection with the illustrious Zenobia. If she saw me change my appearance she would mistrust me. I must adopt one disguise and stick to it. Yes, but what shall it be?" A moment later he added: "Oh, it is very simple. I wish to win the confidence of the sutler-woman by passing as a friend of her friend Lucien. The costume of a retired officer will do. I shall tell her that I have just come from Flanders, and that I served in the 25th of the Line, where I knew Lieutenant Bellefond. Still, I must be careful, for she must know the whole army list. But never mind! Let me set to work." And then the indefatigable spy gaily rose up and opened a closet, the door of which was concealed in the woodwork.

There was here a complete collection of disguises of all sorts, including a great many different wigs. In one corner there were various cosmetics for giving one a youthful appearance or a look of age, and Saint-Privat knew how to use them as well as the most skilful actor. His toilet was soon made. He placed a small wig of short grey hair upon his head; he pasted on whiskers of the same colour, cut, according to army customs, on a level with the lower part of the ear; he traced a few wrinkles at the corners of his mouth to give his face a square look, and after having made up this old, soldier-like face, he put on corresponding clothes—a pair of wide pantaloons, falling over high boots with thick soles, and a long overcoat of dark blue cloth, which fell about his calves like a dressing-gown. He completed this disguise by putting on a stiff stock, a high hat, doe-skin gloves, and taking up a strong bamboo cane. Thus attired, the mild Saint-Privat looked like a retired officer of the "old army," "a brigand of the Loire," as the officers of the Imperial forces were then called.

He wore no moustaches nor decorations, as he knew very well that since the arrival of the allies the ex-officers had thought fit to shave their upper lips and remove their red ribbons as a sign of mourning.

The resemblance was perfect. A soldier would have saluted him in the street, although he was in civilian dress. In order not to be seen by his neighbours with such a warlike air, Saint-Privat went off before daybreak. He had to wait some three or four hours before the

post-office would open, and he spent the time in walking about near the markets, where he could mingle with the crowd unobserved, as it gathers at dawn about the great Parisian provision marts. Many old troopers were to be met with walking in glorious idleness about the streets, and the people liked them.

No one paid any attention to our friend, and thanks to various halts at different cafés, where he took several glasses of brandy to play his part the better, he succeeded in killing time, and went quietly into the court-yard of the Central Post-Office at a few minutes before eight o'clock. He saw with satisfaction that several persons were already waiting at the door. This was better than solitude, as he had less chance of being noticed in a crowd. The exceptional situation of the city easily accounted for the unusual number of persons already waiting, and Saint-Privat at once guessed the cause. The arrival of the allies in Paris, and the change of government which had followed, had naturally led to great perturbation in the interests of all, and to many changes in position. Every one was expecting news from some relation or friend in the provinces or in the army. After any great social or political turmoil, there is always a great desire to inquire after those in whom one is interested; the result being that private correspondence becomes more frequent, and that the post-office services realise great profits.

This was the case in July, 1815, when the carriers transported huge packets of letters every day. There were too few to convey them all, and the employés were almost distracted. The city had not only been invaded by foreigners, but by many persons who had no fixed abodes, such as retired or dismissed officers and provincials flying from the enemy; and all these passing residents had their letters sent *poste restante*, because they were unable to give a permanent address. And as they were all impatient to obtain news from their families or comrades, they besieged the wickets from early dawn.

There were people of the trading classes, workmen, soldiers, and women of all ages; dowagers with pet dogs, mothers with babes, and pert damsels in caps and slippers. The motley crowd stirred about, chatted, and gathered into groups at the door.

The office faced the principal court-yard, and was not then, as now, provided with a room for the reception of the public, who were obliged to wait in the open-air. Saint-Privat, in his disguise, arrived at the moment when the file was being formed at the door. He abstained from taking up a position in it, but began to walk up and down, like a man who has plenty of time and does not care to be crowded.

As he went about the court-yard, and struck his cane upon the pavement, he examined everybody rapidly, so that after five minutes' observation he had seen every face. The fair sex interested him the most under the circumstances. He thought that one of the women must be Zenobia Capitaine, and he tried to guess which one it was.

Not because he intended to rely upon his own sagacity in judging faces, but he wished to find out whether he had as true an instinct as in former days. He had not of late been in the active police, and had got somewhat out of practice.

He found himself in the same situation as a fencing-master who has not handled a foil for a long time, and who amuses himself by making passes at the wall to get his hand in.

He soon saw that there was not a single face that looked as though it belonged to a sutler-woman. Those who had served in the artillery and had gone to Russia could scarcely have the same appearance as mothers of families or working-girls. Saint-Privat had never seen Zenobia, and yet he was perfectly sure that she had not yet arrived.

He was sure, too, that if she came, she would not escape his eyes, for as soon as they opened the wicket he meant to approach the file and station himself so as to see every one pass and hear the names mentioned. Now, Zenobia could not ask for her letter without telling her name, and consequently letting Saint-Privat know it. The false veteran had placed himself in such a way that he did not attract attention. There are always idlers everywhere, and plenty of them were hanging about the post-office that day. Saint-Privat mingled with the groups and entered into conversation with some, imitating the abrupt speech of the veterans of the old army and the guttural tones that caused them to be nicknamed "old grumblers." He excelled in this kind of acting, and whatever part he attempted he played to perfection. This was a natural gift, and he had often utilised it. Prévillé and Molé, whom he had known when young, had often told him that he was a born actor, and indeed he had been very near going upon the stage. But he had also felt a keen desire to enter the secret service; and, besides, it is hard for an actor to make his way at first, and Saint-Privat had to live, besides paying for Clarisse. So he gave up the idea of acting, and became a detective instead.

This time he was playing the detective for his own benefit, and he acted his part with special care. He succeeded remarkably well, and everybody treated him civilly, and thought him a genuine old trooper. He told those about him that he had been waiting for three days, and had come every morning for his letter, which was to contain a money order. This falsehood, which accounted for his presence, was believed by those to whom he told it, and they blamed the post-office authorities for the delay.

Meantime our friend had kept a sharp look-out. The office window was open, and he examined all who appeared. He listened to all the names mentioned, although feeling sure that Zenobia Capitaine had not yet arrived. After forty-five minutes spent in watching and waiting, he began to feel uneasy. He remembered the words of the note from his confederate: "The person will return early to-morrow morning."

The first hour had now gone by, and no one had appeared. "Can

that dunce of a Cornillon have been mistaken?" thought Clarisse's father.

This was possible, although Cornillon was a cunning fox; but Zenobia might have changed her mind, and might not appear till later on. Saint-Privat also knew, besides, that the most essential quality of a detective is patience, and he resigned himself to remaining at hand in search of the sutler-woman, even if it took him all day. Suddenly, while glancing about the court-yard, he saw a couple whose appearance and behaviour made him notice them at once.

A young man was giving his arm to a young woman—a beardless boy, who was slender and well-made, though short. His companion looked somewhat older than he, although still fresh and rather pretty. She had an affected manner, which accorded with her odd attire—a red silk dress, which was too short and too low in the neck, a neckerchief of white linen, and a cap trimmed with green ribbons flying in every direction. This damsel's escort had a timid and embarrassed look, like a schoolboy. He walked along, casting down his eyes, as though ashamed of being seen in such company.

"That's an ill-assorted couple," thought Saint-Privat. "The woman is not of much account, that is clear, and the man looks like a clerk out on leave; but why does he avoid looking at anybody? Why does he walk so awkwardly, as though he were trying to make himself look smaller? It is very odd."

Suddenly the young woman left her companion's arm and at once went up to the file. The youth then turned his back to the crowd, and seating himself on a ledge, crossed his arms and hung his head as though he were counting the paving-stones. All this was natural enough, and yet Saint-Privat had experienced that strange feeling which tells a sportsman that the deer is near.

He did not trouble himself about the man, who did not appear to have any intention of going away; but he watched the woman, who tried her best to get near the wicket. She reached it after a quarter of an hour's pushing, and then said, in a somewhat hoarse voice: "Ah! here I am at last, and I had trouble enough to get up. Is there anything for me to-day?"

"What is your name?" asked the clerk.

"Zenobia Capitaine," replied the woman.

In spite of all his self-possession Saint-Privat started, so that a worthy citizen who was talking to him apologised, thinking that he must have trodden upon his foot. Zenobia Capitaine! Was this she? Could this be-ribboned being be the former sutler-woman of the 19th Artillery? It was enough, indeed, to startle any one.

"Have you any papers?" asked the clerk, turning over a pile of letters.

"Certainly I have," replied the damsel. "You must take me for some one else to ask me such questions."

At the same time she fumbled in the pocket of her red-silk dress. There could be no further doubt; it must be Zenobia herself.

The clerk meanwhile continued to look for the letter.

"If you do not find it among the C's look in the Z's," she resumed, with a laugh, but without showing her papers.

"I have done so; there is nothing," replied the clerk.

"It can't be possible!"

"I tell you that there's nothing for you. Whose turn comes next?"

"Well, this is a nice kind of post-office," exclaimed the damsel, turning away. "It seems that every time one comes here it is all for nothing." And she began to elbow her way out so boldly that she soon effected a passage through the crowd. Not, however, without exciting angry remarks, which she did not appear to care for, for she laughed in the faces of those who complained, and hastened to join her escort, who had not stirred from the ledge upon which he had seated himself.

Saint-Privat, although amazed, took good care not to lose sight of her. The scaffolding of his conjectures had fallen to the ground; but he still retained his coolness. He saw that he had been wrong.

One of two things was the truth—either this hardy damsel with the wonderful cap had really written the letter to Lucien Bellefond, and had falsely called herself a sutler-woman, or this creature had simply been sent there by Zenobia Capitaine herself. This last supposition seemed to Saint-Privat the more probable of the two. It was quite likely that the lieutenant's correspondent had taken the precaution to send some one else to the post-office. In her letter, which the spy knew by heart, she had talked of nothing but the tricks necessary to avoid a surprise. So nothing could be more natural than to send some one else in her place.

Saint-Privat must now follow this woman, however, and he started off. She had again taken the arm of the young man with the modest air, and went away with him, clinging to him like a monkey to a tree. They turned to the right on leaving the courtyard, and went down the street towards the Seine.

The spurious veteran then suddenly began to swear to himself, and to gesticulate like a man who is weary of waiting. This little bit of acting was intended to deceive those around who might have been surprised by his sudden departure.

"Well, well!" he muttered, as he buttoned up his long coat, "these stupid clerks will never have done. I must go and drink a glass to the health of the *other one*, and I shall come back when the cribblers have sorted the morning mail."

The "*other one*," in the language of those times, was Napoleon, and the people present greeted his remarks with a murmur of approval, for they were an indirect protest against the new government. "Our enemy is our master," said La Fontaine, and in France every one puts that axiom into practice. Saint-Privat at once went out into the street, and followed the youth and lady, who did not see him, for they did not once take the trouble to

turn round. They walked along hastily, like persons who have not far to go, and who are anxious to reach their destination.

"That is strange," said the detective to himself. "Since the young chap has been in the street he seems to have grown taller."

The young man had indeed changed his gait and appearance. He no longer appeared to shrink, but held himself upright, and looked ahead instead of gazing at his companion. He seemed to be tired of giving her his arm, and in fact he did so with such carelessness that his feelings respecting her were easily to be conjectured. Saint-Privat guessed this, although he only saw the couple's backs, and thought it a noteworthy detail.

"Who can the fellow be?" he muttered. "Can he be the woman's admirer? He may be, and yet he does not look like it. He looks as though he had made himself appear more boyish to escort her, and in the court-yard he seemed to be trying to get out of sight! Can he be disguised?" And the spy, excited by the problem which he was trying to solve, pricked up his ears like an old war-horse at the smell of gunpowder. "If, as I believe, Zenobia sent this damsel in her place," he thought, "why did she send such a stupid fellow with her? The colonel's envoy is a wide-awake woman, if I am to judge by her letter. Why has she been so stupid as to trust her secret to two persons when one would have sufficed to take her place at the post-office?"

Saint-Privat presently answered his own question by saying: "Bah! Zenobia gave the commission to the woman, and the latter profited by the opportunity to look up her sweetheart. Where? Probably in some shop. He must be a counter-jumper. A clerk and a seamstress, that is quite natural. However—— Well, we shall see, for may I be hanged if I gave up following them till I find out who they are!"

On reaching the end of the Rue Jean Jacques Rousseau, the couple turned to the right, and finally came to the Cour des Fontaines. The spy followed them according to all the rules of the art. He never went nearer than twenty paces, and never kept further away than about thirty; he stopped whenever they did, and looked into all the shop windows, and profited by all the vehicles and groups to slip behind them and keep out of their sight.

His tactics succeeded very well, for the two lovers whom he was following paid no attention to him, and their indifference encouraged him to persevere. "If this young fellow isn't what he appears to be," he said to himself, "if he had any reason for hiding his real personality, he wouldn't be so indifferent to what is going on around him; he would look to the right and left."

The young man, in fact, went on dragging his sweetheart after him with a weary look, and staring up at the sky with the utmost coolness. Saint-Privat had also remarked that he had said a few words to his companion while in the courtyard of the post-office, but that afterwards he had not spoken to her at all. Now, accom-

plices would surely have said something to one another. If these two did not chat, it must be that one or the other was not in the secret as regards the looked-for letter. The spy reasoned thus, for he did not doubt but that the woman with the cap had been sent by Zenobia, and that her companion had nothing to do with the sutler's affairs.

The couple now crossed the Cour des Fontaines rapidly, and reached the Palais-Royal by a dark passage which communicates with the Rue de Valois.

"Where can they be going?" thought Saint-Privat. "They may be going to take breakfast somewhere, and I shall be obliged to wait all that time. Madame Boutard, however, is expecting me in the Rue d'Enfer, and so is Clarisse. Then, too, there is the wounded man. It would annoy me very much to be obliged to spend the whole morning running after Zenobia Capitaine's messenger. But what can I do? I don't want to lose this chance; and if I have to trot about all day, I won't give up till I have the right address."

While he was thus encouraging himself to persevere, the couple had passed the peristyle of the wooden galleries. The commonplace portico was then lined with small shops, symmetrically arranged in several rows, and tenanted by women selling gloves, cravats, collars, and other items of masculine attire. The damsel now suddenly dropped her protector's arm, whispered to him, and opening the door of one of these shops, she resumed a seat to which she was evidently accustomed, for all the women who were selling around her gave her a friendly nod.

This sudden separation greatly embarrassed Saint-Privat. The man was going away, while the woman remained. Which of the party ought he to watch?

There is a saying that one cannot follow two hares at once. In Saint-Privat's case it was impossible to do so, and he was obliged to choose between the two scents which he had found. Besides, he had but a few moments to make up his mind, for the man was about to enter the wooden galleries, and would perhaps disappear by one of their many exits.

It is true that to all appearances he had played but a small part in the matter, and did not know Zenobia's secret. The woman had seated herself at her stall with the evident intention of remaining there, and was already chatting with her neighbours. She must know the sutler; and it might be supposed that at some time during the day, or it might be at night-time, perhaps, after the shops were shut up, she would go to inform her of the result of her mission.

This was very puzzling; and the spy was asking himself what course he ought to pursue, when he was struck by the change of gait of the seeming youth, who went on his way, and was now but a few paces from him. The fellow had straightened himself up and seemed to have grown at least three inches. This seemed strange to Saint-Privat, and he hid behind a post to watch him the better. The fellow's timid gait and careless manner had suddenly given place

to the air and walk of a man used to the Palais-Royal, which was then the meeting-place of all the vicious creatures in Paris. He went past the shops lining the wooden galleries, looking impudently at the women inside, and stopping before those who were pretty with the jauntiest air imaginable. The transformation was complete.

"That is a very remarkable change," said Clarisse's father. "It is only in the police that one can learn to change one's self in that way. What if this fellow should be a detective?"

And he immediately reflected that he could easily find the woman at any time, as she belonged to one of the shops under the archway. The women who occupied them—these shops were removed under Louis-Philippe—were not at all miracles of good conduct, and their dealings were tolerated rather than countenanced. They were entirely under the control of the authorities, who could send them ~~away at the slightest infringement of their licences~~

Saint-Privat, who knew this, felt quite sure of being able to find the woman with the green ribbons whenever he wished, and of ascertaining all about her, through his comrade Cornillon.

He was now in the position of a sportsman between a buck and a hind. A new idea occurred to him at this moment, however. "What if I were mistaken?" thought he. "What if Zenobia's messenger should be the man? What if the woman was only a secondary messenger? What, too, if this person is acting in some other interest than that of the sutler? Then everything would be clear. A woman was needed to apply for the letter, and that fellow made use of this creature as if she had been an errand-boy. Yes, that is very likely; but for whom can he be acting? How can he have found out the secret? How did he become acquainted with Zenobia Capitaine, and how did he know that she was likely to come to the post-office? The police did not know it; indeed, I am the only person possessed of this information, for Lucien Bellefond's letter remained in my pocket instead of reaching its address."

All these deductions occupied Saint-Privat less time than it takes to tell them, and his conclusion was: "I shall certainly do better to follow the man. When I have tracked him to his address, I shall have time to return to the woman; those little birds do not fly away, or if they do, their perches are easily found. Let me go ahead!"

Then, after reading and noting the number of the damsel's shop, Saint-Privat set out after the fine gentleman a few paces ahead of him.

The gallery, built in 1830 by the Duc d'Orleans, and called by his name, gives no idea of the famous wooden galleries which stood on the same site. In 1815 the latter had already been celebrated for some years, having been most flourishing during the period of Barras's rule in France. To picture them, it is only necessary to suppose the space now occupied by the elegant shops which line

the *Galérie d'Orleans*, covered with a double row of closed stalls, some of which were occupied by well-known booksellers. In the middle of the gallery, which was much wider than it is now, there were two parallel alleys, in which idlers went up and down past the railings, like horses in a riding-school. A row of windows, the panes of which were often broken, let the rain in here and there, but the place was supposed to be sheltered. Fashionable articles, perfumes, prints, and books were sold here. But it was at night, especially, that the place was thronged. A crowd of dissipated fellows arrived at dusk, and stayed there all night, making a terrible tumult. Women in flashy attire walked up and down, and the dealers offered their faded finery in a loud voice. There was dining, and supping, and dancing in the basements below; and the smell of cooking was perceptible, with the noise of brass kettles and pans. It was like a *Witches' Sabbath*, and certainly there were plenty of witches.

These galleries were also greatly frequented during the day-time, but there was much less noise. Foreigners, especially, went there at an early hour on the way to breakfast, for it was then the fashion to patronise the cafés in the palace, and in summer to take lemonade in the gardens.

It might now be half-past ten o'clock, and there were officers of all the armies of the Holy Alliance—heavy-looking Prussians, dragging their huge boots over the flagstones, and dandified Englishmen walking along like fighting cocks. Here and there, also, Austrians in white, and Russians in green, were to be seen. They belonged to the advanced guard of their respective armies, which were coming nearer to Paris every day.

The French, who did not rise so early, left the field free for all these conquerors, and the gallant of the damsel with the be-ribboned cap was almost the only promenader in civilian dress. Saint-Privat, in going after him, did not reflect that his veteran's attire might attract attention, but he soon saw that he must be prudent lest he should be detected. The young fellow went along slowly, making eyes at all the stall-keepers, and joking with them, without caring the least in the world whether he excited the jealousy of his sweetheart, who from her own place under the archway could easily see him. This detail did not escape Saint-Privat, and he became more and more convinced that no very tender tie existed between them. He at the same time tried to imitate the demeanour of the equivocal personage whom he was tracking, and to tarry like him before the stalls; but his attire was out of keeping with such an impudent part, and the stall-keepers, taking him for a genuine old soldier, offered him military collars instead of replying to his jokes.

He had only reached the middle of the gallery, when the gallant turned his head and saw what the half-pay officer seemed to be about. He merely glanced at him, when he at once made up his mind to go to the opposite archway and out by the *Montpensier* gallery. This was enough to dispel Saint-Privat's last doubt.

"That suffices," he muttered. "That fellow is forty years old at the least, and I now know that I shall not make any mistake in following him. Whether he be working for Zenobia or for himself, the woman was a mere accomplice." And he resumed his pursuit with more ardour than before.

When Saint-Privat reached the so-called stone gallery, he saw that his man had reached the gardens, and was crossing them in an oblique direction. He was walking somewhat faster, but did not seem in any hurry to get away. He did not turn round, and yet the spy felt sure that the cunning fellow knew that he was being followed. "That man has eyes at the back of his head," he muttered. "If he does not see me he smells me. Attention! he will give me trouble." And then Saint-Privat, who also had excellent eyesight, pretended to be looking into a jeweller's shop.

The other man went on in the meanwhile, stopping for a moment, however, before the ornamental water to say a few cheeky words to two young shop-girls on the way to their employer's. The meek-looking youth had become a dashing admirer of the fair sex.

"Where can he be going?" thought Saint-Privat, gliding along from arch to arch, so as not to lose sight of him.

At that moment, however, just as he was about to leave the gallery so as to follow the singular individual more closely, he found himself face to face with his assistant, Cornillon, who had come from the garden.

"Ah! there you are!" said Saint-Privat. "How lucky? You must explain to me-----"

But Cornillon did not turn or reply. He passed Saint-Privat as stiff as a post, although the latter attempted to accost him, and he did not even look at him as he said: "No nonsense, master! He sees us. Come and join me at the Café des Bourdonnais."

Saint-Privat realised that the detective must have good reasons for all this, and did not insist.

He glided along the avenue where he had talked the night before with Lucien, and began spying again, keeping behind the trees as well as he could. "Cornillon has given me a lesson," he muttered. "How could I be such a fool as to forget that the man was looking without appearing to do so? I should not have made such a mistake fifteen years ago. See what it is to forget one's business!"

Meantime, the pursued man had left the shop-girls, and was hastening toward the Valois gallery. Saint-Privat, not wishing to let him gain too much advance, was now forced to walk out from among the trees, and consequently to show himself. "I do wrong to worry myself," he thought. "Supposing that this fellow has seen me, he must take me for some old trooper, and it is impossible for him to mistrust me. Thank heaven! I still know how to make up my face. The fool will not see into it all."

The "fool" meantime was walking in front of the arches,

There were here some tables in the open air, at which two or three persons were already taking their coffee.

"If he would sit down," thought Saint-Privat, "I could watch him at my ease, and if I looked at him for five minutes, I should know what to think."

While preparing a cunning scheme to keep an eye upon the enemy, he was gradually going towards the corner of the garden, intending to turn to the right so as to cross the path of the person who puzzled him so much. All went very well at first. The man placed himself in the middle of the gallery, and looked around with a careless air. Saint-Privat put on a stern expression, pulled up the collar of his coat, and twirled his cane with a great flourish. The imitation was perfect, and the various shopkeepers who were standing at the doors of their establishments looked with sympathetic curiosity at this glorious wreck of the old army. In another moment he would be able to examine the suspicious-looking friend of the be-ribboned beauty ; but suddenly the pursued man made up his mind to enter the café before which he had tarried.

"Good !" said Saint-Privat to himself. "I have him now ! He is going to breakfast here, and I will do the same."

Full of confidence in his own judgment, he was about to enter the place, when he caught sight of its name. "The Café de Valois !" muttered he. "Ah ! the rascal has chosen a good retreat. He knows that I cannot go in there, and that is why he has gone there."

The Café de Valois had become the royalist meeting-place ever since the first Restoration. During the Hundred Days it had been almost ruined, while its rival, the Montansier, prospered with the custom of the Bonapartists. However, the Bourbons had returned, and with them the *émigrés* and the body-guards who had accompanied Louis XVIII. to Ghent ; and the fortunate victualler did not now know which way to turn, for his place was full from morning till night. His triumph was all the more complete, as on the arrival of the allies the police had had his rival's shop shut up, after the crowd had ransacked it from top to bottom.

At that time, then, to breakfast or take an ice at the Café de Valois expressed one's feelings as to politics ; and the enemies of the restored Government never set foot there excepting to pick a quarrel with some one. This was not a rare event, it is true, and indeed the half-pay officers often diverted themselves in this way when they wanted to fight.

But Clarisse's father had only the appearance of an old soldier, and for many reasons he did not wish to get into a difficulty. It was already a great deal to have acted as a second at a duel with knives. He did not wish to participate in one with swords or pistols. On the other hand, however, he did not want his man to escape him ; so he adopted a middle course, which consisted in keeping near the accursed café, the entrance of which was forbidden him.

The proprietor of the establishment kept the doors open on account of the heat, and Saint-Privat could see the dandy take a seat, and hear him ask for a cup of coffee. He had not time to look at him, but he was struck by the sound of his voice. It seemed to him that he had heard it before, and his ears remembered as well as his eyes did. Still, he could not tell where that somewhat nasal voice had previously struck him. One detail which he observed, and which surprised him unpleasantly, was that the fellow had placed himself near two English officers, the same who had acted as seconds of the Prussian major. This coincidence was strange, to say the least; and Saint-Privat, who, thanks to his disguise, was not afraid of being recognised by the islanders, glanced in to see if they would enter into conversation with their neighbour. He found that they were talking with one another without noticing him, but he caught the eye of the man whom he was watching, and the latter looked at him with a mocking expression, which made him lower his own eyes.

"He has found me out in spite of my disguise; and he is on his guard," said Saint-Privat to himself, as he continued his walk. "But where have I seen those eyes before?"

He could not remember, and felt greatly perplexed. It was evident that the stranger knew that he was watched, and would do all he could to throw the spy off his track. Should he persist in following him at the risk of losing his time or falling into some trap, for a man pointed out by Cornillon was a man to be feared? Would it not be better to relinquish the pursuit and begin it again on the morrow at the post-office, after a chat with Cornillon? Those who had applied for Zenobia Capitaine's letter would certainly return, and he (Saint-Privat) still had the resource of questioning the woman who kept the little shop in the Palais-Royal. However, after ripe reflection, he decided to remain.

He wished to know what to think of this mysterious man, for a secret instinct told him that he was on the right track. So he seated himself upon a bench, from which he could see the door of the Café de Valois, and waited. And he did not have to wait long. The man swallowed his chocolate in ten minutes, rose, and went into the garden. Saint-Privat began stirring up the gravel with his cane, and looked at him stealthily. The man came towards him chewing a toothpick, and humming an air.

"He does not seem to mistrust me now. Can I be mistaken?" thought Saint-Privat.

He was still more astonished when the man came close up to him, and took a seat at the other end of the bench. Saint-Privat thereupon quietly rose up, and went on slowly towards the linden trees. The stranger also rose and went behind him.

"The devil take him!" muttered Clarisse's father, "he seems to be following me at present. I was the sportsman; have I become the game? Well, we shall see!"

He now walked quickly on to the Montpensier gallery. When he had reached the fountain he turned. The man was following at a short distance behind.

"This is strange," muttered the ex-police agent.

He passed under the arches, going towards the Montansier theatre. The man remained in the garden, but still walked on. Saint-Privat then stopped in front of a jeweller's shop, and the stranger began to look at the children playing on the gravel walk. When Saint-Privat returned to the wooden galleries, the man did the same.

"He is tracking me, that is clear," said Clarisse's father to himself, "and he does it as though he had been a detective ever since he was born. Upon my word of honour, I believe that he also belongs to the house! A man cannot manœuvre like that when he does not form part of the police."

And, indeed, although the stranger assumed the air of an idler taking the air after breakfast, he had not lost sight of the spy for an instant. Saint-Privat could not believe his own eyes, and was lost in conjectures. "What can it mean?" he muttered. "Does he merely wish to throw me off the track or to know where I am going? At all events, I will give him a good chance to stretch his legs."

However, before leaving the Palais-Royal, he made a fresh experiment by returning a few steps, so as to pass before the obstinate watcher. This was conclusive. The fellow now turned to the left, just enough to avoid meeting him, but still keeping near him. The spurious veteran then turned round, went quickly on, and finally turned again when he had reached the end of the garden. The stranger was twenty paces behind him.

"It is evident," said Saint-Privat to himself, "that I have a more cunning individual than myself to deal with, and there is no more time to be lost in trifling. If this scamp follows me, it cannot be for any good object, and I don't want him to find out where I live. I must get rid of him. I will take the matter up again after I have seen Cornillon."

With this resolve, the spy quickly passed along the stone gallery, darted into a narrow passage communicating with the Rue Montpensier, and hastened to the Rue de Rohan, a street which does not now exist. When he reached the Rue de Rivoli, he glanced back, and saw the man gliding along close to the last houses in the Rue de Richelieu.

This looked serious, and Saint-Privat began to think that the police, who were aware of his pursuits, were watching him, or else that his own game had been guessed at, and that some one else had an eye on Lacaussade's money. However, he did not lose his coolness, but hastened on to the Tuileries, where he hoped to get away more easily.

He could not have chosen better, for there was a great crowd in the gardens, although it was so early. Since Louis XVIII. had

again taken possession of the palace, from which he had been so suddenly expelled on the night of the 20th of March, the royalists met every day in front of the Pavillon de l'Horloge, in the hope that the monarch would appear upon the balcony to bow to his faithful subjects. On that day there was a large crowd, owing to the fact that, on the night before, some one had called out : "Long live the Emperor !" when the king appeared.

The "faithful" were anxious to show by their presence that they disapproved of this rude conduct. On the other hand, the malcontents hoped that it might occur again. Thus it was that, as some had come to applaud, and others to hiss, the Parisians had gathered in throngs in front of the window where Louis XVIII. usually appeared towards noon.

Saint-Privat was delighted with this, and he went lightly through the open gate, dashing into the midst of the crowd, but not without looking back. He had the annoyance of seeing that the indefatigable fellow was crossing the street. However, as he hoped to get rid of him in the throng, he went straight ahead and soon thought that he had succeeded, for he now saw only strange faces near him. However, he fancied he could detect that his appearance was not agreeable to those among whom he now found himself. Chance had, indeed, led him into the midst of some ardent royalists, who glanced at him furiously.

While flying from the man whom he had at first chased with so much ardour, the good Saint-Privat had forgotten that he wore a disguise. The officers of the old army were greatly disliked by those who frequented the royal gardens, and the better his disguise, the more risk he ran among those who were hostile to the usurper.

He realised all this somewhat too late, for he overheard angry remarks, and he was roughly jostled. However, he could not turn back, and besides, the enemy was at his heels.

He went on, being pushed, and jostled, and shouted at, and he was soon carried in to the central avenue, where the enthusiasts of the Restoration were shouting :

"Hail to King William
 And his soldiers brave !
 The offspring of this kingdom
 Doth his prowess save !
 By his matchless victories
 He has brought us peaceful days ;
 And his claim to glory is
 The compassion he displays !
 Hail, Alexander !
 Greatest of the great,
 Who ne'er lists to slander
 Nor ventures to dictate ;
 This monarch so august,
 May trebly claim applause :
 He is valiant and just ;
 And the Bourbon he restores !"

An immense circle had been formed at the foot of the Pavillon de l'Horloge, for at that time the palace was not separated from the gardens, and this circle was composed of men and women of all conditions, who were dancing about and shouting out this wretched doggerel in praise of our conquerors, the King of Prussia and the Emperor of Russia. Saint-Privat was no patriot, and did not think of getting indignant with the fools, who, under pretence of praising the Bourbon king, were basely singing the praises of the enemies of France. He had other thoughts to occupy his mind at that moment, for he was trying to cross the gardens to escape by the quays, and hoped to be able to do so.

There was an occasional opening in the crowd, thanks to the energetic pushing of some of the spectators who objected to the anti-national songs. They were stout fellows, with tight coats buttoned up to the chin, military stocks and bamboo canes, just like Clarisse's father. They also had red ribbons in their button-holes, which seemed to be worn as a signal.

Saint-Privat had no ribbon, but he looked so much like an old soldier that these men began to beckon to him, and call out to him—an honour which he would willingly have dispensed with, for he was surrounded by people who had white cockades on their hats. He tried to get away from them, when suddenly a loud shout announced that the king had appeared upon the balcony. At the same moment, a loud hissing rose above the singing of the dancers. A frightful tumult followed.

Saint-Privat was at once assailed by his neighbours, and did not see his majesty go away raising his hand to his head to show his grief, as the paper said that he did—this was the *Journal des Débats* of the following morning—however, he saw the unpleasant face of his persecutor from whom he had succeeded in escaping a moment before, by slipping into the crowd, and he heard the fellow call out: "Knock him down! He is the rascal who hissed! Knock him down at once!"

As may well be imagined, the ex-director of the dark room now forgot all about Zenobia Capitaine, for he thought that his last hour had come. Twenty arms were raised above him, and he cursed the fatal idea which he had had of attiring himself as a Bonapartist. However, unexpected help was at hand.

The wearers of the red ribbons, taking him for one of themselves, came to the rescue. In the twinkling of an eye, Saint-Privat was dragged off, pulled along, or rather carried away, by his vigorous defenders, who darted like a whirlwind into the crowd, trod upon the routed dancers, and made their way with one bound towards the railing near the quay. So stunned that he did not know where he was, Clarisse's father hardly heard some rough voice saying to him: "We have rescued you, comrade. Make off as fast as you can, and remember to do as much for us whenever necessary."

The spy had slandered his disguise, for it was that alone which had saved him. He now looked around, and saw merely some quiet pedestrians who had nothing to do with the disturbance. The rascal who had tried to have him knocked down was still in the crowd.

Saint-Privat called an empty coach that passed, jumped in, and told the driver to take him to the Rue des Bourdonnais. After such an occurrence, any other person would have been only too glad to go home. But our friend was not like most people, and it was under serious circumstances that he showed his superiority. He had scarcely revived when he began to think of his appointment with Cornillon. The danger he had incurred excited him to follow up the adventure. The more the conduct of the fellow whom he had pursued puzzled him, the more he longed to know the reason of it. Cornillon was able to explain, it appeared, and so he now turned to him. The coach went along rapidly, but it seemed to Saint-Privat that it went very slowly. He suddenly started at a thought which occurred to him. "What if I had met with the driver of last night? What could I have said to him? He must have found his coach full of blood this morning. Bah!" he added, after a moment's thought, "he would not have known me." However, he could not help recalling the scenes of the night before; and he could not hide from himself that he was engaged in a very perilous undertaking, which had led to no good result so far. A wounded man to take care of was all that had come to him. As for Zenobia, the mystery thickened, and without her nothing would be attained.

He hastily alighted from the coach at the entrance of the Rue des Bourdonnais. He did not wish to get out of it in front of the café where his assistant was waiting for him, and he acted rightly, for the customers who frequented that quiet place would certainly have gone to the door to look at such a display.

Those who went there almost all lived in the neighbourhood, and were petty dealers or clerks. A new face in the establishment was an event, for there were never many people in the Café des Bourdonnais. However, Saint-Privat was not a stranger to it, as he went there from time to time. He had been in the habit of going there when working for the police service, and there was a rumour to the effect that he had discovered the name of one of the inventors of the infernal machine by listening with an indifferent air to the conversation of two men at a neighbouring table. However, the master of the establishment had never heard of this, and took Saint-Privat for a most honest and inoffensive man.

Cornillon also had a habit of going there to take an occasional glass, and had often made appointments with his former employer to talk over business. On that occasion he had been there for a full hour, and had already drunk three glasses of beer when the spurious veteran appeared at the door. Saint-Privat was not altogether at his ease as to his disguise, for he did not care to be recognised by the people of the house in his borrowed plumes.

He was soon comforted, however. The landlord of the place was away. The woman behind the counter, a fat old gossip, who had a habit of joking with him, made him a bow evidently intended as a mark of respect to the old army, and the waiter gazed at him with admiration. Tranquillised in this respect, he went up to Cornillon, who was seated at the end of the room, not far from a stout old gentleman with a pleasant face, who had fallen fast asleep over a newspaper. Our friend made a military bow to his confederate, took a stool, and placed himself in front of him, saying in a low tone :

"I have a great deal to tell you. Pay, and let us go. I don't wish this man to hear what I am going to say."

"No danger ! I know him. He is as deaf as a post," replied the detective.

"Are you sure of that ?"

"As sure as I am that you made a great mess of it this morning. Besides, you shall see."•

And leaning towards his neighbour he called out loudly : "Let me have the 'Commerce' sir, when you have done with it."

The fat man opened his eyes and replied : "Thanks, sir. I never take anything between meals."

"What did I tell you ?" said Cornillon.

The waiter had overheard and made haste to come up. "Never mind, sir," said he, laughing. "This gentleman is so deaf that you might fire a cannon behind him without his hearing it. Monsieur Machefer, these gentlemen want the newspaper," he added, taking the paper from the old man, who allowed him to do so and then went to sleep again. "He is as talkative as he is deaf," resumed the waiter. "He never takes anything but sugar and water, and stays here snoring by the hour. He isn't poor, however, for he is a dealer in salt-provisions in the Rue Montmartre."

"Two glasses of good brandy and make haste !" growled Saint-Privat, in the hoarse voice which he knew so well how to assume.

"Here it is, commander," said the waiter, convinced that the old soldier must have a right to big epaulets.

The two glasses were soon swallowed, and Clarisse's father, as soon as he felt sure that no one could hear what he said, began the conversation by saying : "As you knew that I should make a mess of it, why did you write to me to set to work myself ?"

"Why ? I suspect, master, that you know that very well already."

"I believe that the man who made himself up to look so young is fully forty, if not fifty years old, but that is all I know."

"As to his age, master, you are right, and I am sure that you saw that he deducts two inches from his height by stooping when he walks."

"Certainly, I am still able to see all that, thank heaven, but I did not come here to be complimented. Tell me why you made me work instead of working yourself ?"

"Because I thought that he would not notice you, but with me——"

"You are wrong. I had not followed him for a quarter of an hour before he found me out. And when he did so he began to stroll about in zigzags till he came to the Café de Valois——"

* "Yes, after I met you under the archway."

"And do you know how he ended? He saw that I was waiting for him outside while he was taking his chocolate, and so he came straight towards me."

"Did he speak to you?"

"No, but instead of allowing himself to be followed, he began to follow me."

"Indeed!"

"It is so."

"Well, sir, then he is even more cunning than I took him to be."

"Oh, as to that, when I was in the garden of the Tuileries he capped the climax by exciting the fools who were dancing under the balcony where the king appears; he told them to knock me down, and I came near being killed."

"That was abominable!" muttered Cornillon. "Did you succeed in throwing him off the track?"

"Yes, fortunately; I found some officers there in civilians' dress, who thought that I was one of themselves, and who rescued me."

"That doesn't surprise me. There is not one in the 'house' who can make himself up as you can. But I tell you, sir, I was right in advising you to disguise yourself."

"Bah! he saw through all that. However, this is enough about what occurred this morning. Tell me who this man is."

"He belongs to the police."

"That cannot be. I never saw him before."

"He came among us two years after you left, and, besides, he only worked for the political service."

"Under whom?"

"Under Rovigo, who employed him abroad; but I believe that he worked for Fouché, underhand, all the time. I met him twice in 1810 in the hall of the house on the Quai Malaquais."

"Whom is he at work for now?"

"I don't exactly know. He deserted the Bonapartists after the first return of the Bourbons, and I think that Fouché must have taken him back then."

"Doesn't he go to the 'house'?"

"No, I have not seen him for five years, but I never forget a face that I have looked at closely, and I am sure that I recognised him yesterday at the post-office. Unfortunately, he knew me, too."

"How do you know that?"

"He let me follow him as far as the wooden galleries, and then, after taking his sweetheart home, he passed close to me in the

garden, and said as he went by: 'Number 69, I don't like to have anybody at my heels. Get off, and don't come after me again, or in twenty-four hours from now I'll settle your hash.'

"He knew your number, then? This is serious."

"I should say so, indeed! Only the minister knows it. So this fellow must be in the minister's employ. You see now, master, why I wrote to you to work in my place."

Saint-Privat did not reply. He was thinking. All at once, however, he said: "Who was the woman with him?"

"The woman?" repeated Cornillon. "Oh, she is not calculated to make a man any richer."

"She sells cravats and gloves in the wooden galleries."

"You found that out, did you? He must have taken her back there, then, to-day, just as he did yesterday!"

"He took her back, then, yesterday, did he? Come, tell me all about what you did yesterday. Tell me from beginning to end."

"It won't take long. I was going up and down the court-yard of the post-office, where I had been for an hour or so, when he came in with that creature on his arm. I did not suspect him at first, although his fresh complexion seemed to be a make-up and his timid look merely assumed. But I heard the woman ask at the wicket, giving the name you told me, and I opened my eyes. She was informed that there was no letter, and then she said: 'Very well, I'll come back to-morrow,' and off she went with the chap who had waited for her at the door. I immediately recognised the fellow whom I had formerly met in the Duke of Otranto's waiting-rooms. You won't say, master, that I'm not devoted to you, for there is not one of us but would have been tempted to stop at that. You know that Fouché is Minister of Police again. He has a long arm, and does not like to have his friends annoyed. He could make me smart for watching this one. However, I did not care, and after him I went. I must say that I hoped he would not suspect anything. But I was mistaken. I have told you what a settler he gave me in the garden. You know, too, that it was then that I stopped following him. It was the best thing I could do, for I am married, and I need my pay. I have three children to keep, one at nurse. You know how it is. Still I should have held out all the same if I had not remembered that the woman would return to-day. Then I said to myself that there was no harm done, as you could take my place, and I wrote to you to do so."

"And I thank you, old fellow, although it has not done any good, as the rascal found me out at once. But I am sorry that you did not think of getting the woman to talk. She does not know you, and might have let out a good deal."

"As to what, master?" asked Cornillon, with a simple air.

"In the first place, I want to know whether she came for the letter on her own account or for that scamp."

"Oh, sir, how can you doubt?"

"But it seems to me——"

"It is not very hard to guess that, if she were working on her own account, she wouldn't need to be accompanied by a first-class detective. If he has an interest in getting the letter he cannot ask for it in person, as it is addressed to a woman. He could not say to the clerk: 'I am Zenobia,' whereas the woman could. It was all easy enough with her help. All he had to do was to pay her well for it."

"Yes, most likely. But this creature is not Zenobia, and yet she was not at all disturbed when they asked her if she had a passport."

"Her protector must have given her the necessary papers. All he had to do was to forge them at Fouché's office. You know very well, sir, that we used to do such things ourselves."

"Good! then you think that the woman is merely an assistant?"

"I pledge my word that she is."

"I don't say that you're mistaken, but I should like to be sure of it. You must go and question her closely to-night."

"I have done what is necessary, master."

"What! have you talked with her?"

"No, I'm not such a fool. But I scraped an acquaintance with her little friends, who cannot endure the sight of her because she drives a better trade at her stall than they do at theirs."

"What did they tell you?"

"In the first place, her name is Zulma. Zulma and Zenobia, you see, both begin with the same letter. Then the man is one of her best customers, and he is in the habit of going to the wooden galleries. He is known everywhere, not by his real name, however, for they call him Monsieur Oscar. It appears that he is a bold fellow," added Cornillon. "He is gay, and lives in style, and is as generous as a lord. All the women are after him in the Palais-Royal, but he had not been seen there for three months, when he suddenly reappeared last week. You may imagine how they all tried to sell gloves and ties to him. Zulma did the best of all. He took her two days running to the Cadran-Bleu and the Ambigu Comique. That was a good way to win her over. Then he went for her at an early hour yesterday to take her to breakfast, so he said, and returned to-day at the same hour. Her acquaintances do not know where they went, as Zulma did not tell them, but they will know all about it in a few days, for he seems to be tired of her, and when he stops buying at her shop she will talk out. Besides, she does not know, or doesn't appear to know, that he belongs to the police, although the others suspect it. That is all, sir, and it seems to me to be pretty clear."

"It is, indeed. I am sure now that it is the man, and not the woman, who is looking for Zenobia; but why does he wish to find her?"

"As to that, master, I have nothing to say, as you have not told me who Zenobia is, and I shall not take the liberty to inquire, as I

never meddle with what doesn't concern me. However, if I have any advice to give you, it is not to follow that fellow about. He is thick with Fouché, that's certain, and Fouché might get angry."

"You are right. Nothing can be done at present. But if you can tell me anything else concerning this man you will be doing me a great service."

"With pleasure, master. I cannot work in this myself, because he told me my number to my face at once, but I will speak to Number Fifteen and Number Thirty-three, who are in the political brigade, and will find out everything for me. I myself believe that this dandy must be in the private police of Louis XVIII. In fact, it is easy to see it. He has all his time to himself, and plenty of money in his pockets. I'll bet that he has been oftener at the château than at the 'house.'"^{*}

"Very likely, and I rely upon you, old fellow, to find out all about it for me."

"I will. I shall need a week, though, because it may not be very easy. This day week, I shall be here at noon."

"I will come here then."

"And am I to continue keeping a look-out?"

"At the post-office? No," said Saint-Privat, with a sigh. "The rascal is too much on his guard, but at the coach office and the War Office I see no difficulty."

"Very well, I will tell my comrades to-night. And now, sir, have you anything else to order of me? I must go and report."

Saint-Privat seemed in no hurry to answer his confederate. He was looking around him. The café was fuller than it had been at first, and the old man whom the waiter called Monsieur Machefer seemed to be sleeping very comfortably.

"Have you been to the 'house' this morning?" asked Clarisse's father, lowering his voice, although the whole conversation had been far from loud.

"Yes, sir."

"Was there any talk of a duel last night between a Prussian and a Frenchman?"

"I heard nothing of it, master. There was only a coachman who came to declare that a foreign officer had been murdered in his conveyance." Saint-Privat said nothing, but turned somewhat pale under his painted wrinkles. "That was not a duel," resumed Cornillon. "Besides, the driver was so drunk that he could not remember anything except that his coach was full of blood."

Saint-Privat drew a long breath, and then said in a careless tone: "What did they do?"

"They sent the man to the guard-house, and the coach to the pound. There are orders to begin an inquiry, but it's all stuff. They'll never find out anything."

* The Palace of the Tuileries and the Prefecture of Police.—TRANS.

"Very likely, and I don't care. But tell me, have you ever been told to watch a half-pay lieutenant named Lucien Bellefond ?"

"For political reasons ?"

"Yes."

"Well, you know, sir, that I am not in the political police. But Number Fifteen and Number Thirty-three are in it. I'll ask them, if you like."

"You will oblige me. Let us go now. Go out first. No one knows what may happen. If you see the scoundrel who gave me such a run, you must tap lightly upon the window. I will wait five minutes."

"Very well, sir. Good-day!" said Cornillon, rising and going out.

The spurious veteran then called the waiter, paid for the beer and brandy, and after having coughed and spat, to give his confederate time to warn him, he rose and went out, making a flourish with his cane in lieu of a bow as he passed the woman at the counter and the customers. As he had hoped, the way was free. He quickly repaired to a coach-stand, engaged a vehicle, and ordered the driver to take him to the Rue d'Enfer. He was longing to embrace his daughter, to see the wounded lieutenant again, and to get rid of his disguise. He had another supply of attire there in the charge of the faithful Bourdache, and he wished to appear before Clarisse in his usual dress, and to have some breakfast, for by this time he was as hungry as a wolf.

While he was going off, the deaf man made up his mind to wake up and leave the café.

VI.

THE cravat-seller's whilom companion, the scamp who had tried to play Saint-Privat such a trick under the king's balcony, had not pursued him any further. He had, perhaps, merely wished to frighten the false "brigand of the Loire" by exciting the royalists against him. As soon as he saw the real officers run up to rescue their supposed comrade, this mysterious personage beat a prudent retreat, and walked to the gate facing the Rue de Rivoli. He turned to the right when he got there, and presently came out upon the Place du Carrousel, where some of the conquering troops were still encamped.

The place was full of Prussian soldiers, who were making their soup midway between the Louvre and the Tuileries, and keeping a lookout, as though they were campaigning. Scaffoldings were being raised round the Arc de Triomphe to take down the *quadriga* captured by the French soldiers, and tear off the bas-reliefs recording their glory. No patriots passed this mournful spot, and indeed more than one Frenchman went a long distance out of his way to avoid the esplanade occupied by the foreign soldiers.

However, the individual who had gone to the post-office to obtain possession of Zenobia Capitaine's letters no doubt possessed a heart that was not sensitive as to national humiliation, for he looked with evident pleasure at the foreigners. He even stopped more than once, and spoke in excellent German to some of King William's grenadiers. If the retired officers who had saved Saint-Privat had been there, it is probable that they would have followed and punished him, but they never went near the camps of the allied army. At last the fellow left the Place du Carrousel, and then went up the quay, along which Clarisse's father had just passed in his coach, so that he came very near meeting him. He crossed by the Pont des Arts, at the end of which the ~~many~~ Prussians had placed two cannon, and then went towards the Quai Malaquais.

After passing the Palace of the Institute of France, he came to a partially open door at ten paces from the court-yard of a large house, and, quickly pushing this door wide open, he entered a dark passage which he seemed to know perfectly well, as he darted quickly along it. It led to a winding staircase, which he went up in all haste, and which led to the first floor, where a man in black stood at the door of a little ante-room. This man had the appearance of an usher.

"Is his excellency to be seen?" asked the stranger.

"His excellency has just come in, and has given orders that no one is to disturb him," replied the usher, in a solemn tone of voice; "however, as he asked this morning if you had been here, I will tell him that you have now arrived." And, opening a folding-door, he vanished.

"When these Jacobins change their politics they know how to assume the airs of princes," muttered the visitor.

The usher soon returned, and made a sign for him to follow.

A man with a pale face was walking up and down in a sumptuously furnished room, something between a drawing room and a study. It is unnecessary to describe him, for his portrait has become a part of history. It was Fouché, minister of police under Louis XVIII.—Napoleon's former adviser, Robespierre's ex-colleague—the man who had once worn a monk's gown, and who had voted for the death of Louis XVI. This unfrocked monk and regicide, who had become Duke of Otranto, was in a very bad humour that day.

"Here you are at last, sir," said he, fixing his fiery grey eyes upon the new-comer; "I have been waiting three days for you."

"Your excellency knows that I was only absent in order to serve you," replied the friend of the be-ribboned damsel, without being in the least disconcerted.

"To serve me, indeed," growled Fouché, who was already mollified. "I sent you to Wellington's headquarters, and I know that you have fulfilled my mission; but that is no reason why you should venture to lose your time for the best part of a week, when I need you, too."

"I have not been losing my time, your excellency."

"Do not tell me that. I have had three reports which tell me that you pass all your time in the wooden gallery at the Palais-Royal."

"You have had me watched then, your excellency? That is a great compliment, I'm sure."

"I am told that you have dealings with the women about there, and that you gamble."

"Ah! your excellency, I have always had my vices, and do not conceal them; but your excellency has been kind enough to overlook them until now, on account of the small talents that I also possess."

"Be as vicious as you please, if you only attend to your business."

"It seems to me, your excellency, that there is no fault to find as to that."

"What? Why, I told you to watch the troublesome men who disturb public order in the gardens of the Tuileries!"

"I have just come from there, your excellency."

"So have I; and I have heard and seen some pretty things. There were seditious cries, and the king was insulted."

"I know who the culprits are, and if your excellency will give me leave, I will hand them over to you within forty-eight hours."

"Well, we shall see about it. But, in the meantime, you were to organise a service to watch over the safety of the allied officers, and now I am informed that a Prussian major was murdered last night."

"I know about that, your excellency. It was not a murder, but a duel. And if your excellency wishes to know all the particulars, you have only to send some one to the Café de Valois, where two English officers are breakfasting—officers who were Major Gruner's seconds in the duel. You see that I know the name of the deceased."

Fouché looked his agent full in the face, and undoubtedly realised that he was telling the truth, for he resumed in a different tone: "Well, I am beginning to think that you have not been so idle, after all. Did you learn this yourself?"

"Yes; while breakfasting near these gentlemen. They thought that they might venture to speak out before a Frenchman. But I understand all languages."

"Yes; I know that you have your good qualities, Max, and I am disposed to forgive your escapades on one condition."

"Your excellency's conditions are agreed to beforehand."

"On condition, then, that you find me two jail-birds, whom I particularly wish to secure."

"Will you condescend to explain the matter to me, your excellency."

"Read!" said Fouché, taking up the *Journal des Débats* of that morning, and placing it in his agent's hand.

The latter then read out: "It is reported that General Exelmans and General Flahaut are established at Effiat in Auvergne. With eight hundred men, they occupy a château which they have fortified, and from which they are spreading terror throughout the neighbourhood."

"That army cannot appear very formidable to the government," said the spy, with a smile. "Are these the two jail-birds to whom your excellency alludes?"

"No, indeed, you scamp! What, don't you see that this ridiculous news has been inserted to deceive us? It is Marshal Ney and Colonel Labédoyère whom I am looking for. It is known that they are hidden somewhere in the south, and this is an attempt to put me on a false scent, but I am no such fool."

"Then your excellency thought of sending me on a little provincial tour?"

"Exactly. I know that you are the only man who can catch them for me."

"A marshal of France and a colonel! Such captures are not easy to effect."

"You shall be well paid; be easy as to that. I know that there are great risks to be incurred, so that you shall be rewarded accordingly, and as soon as you present your demand, providing you succeed."

"Where shall I have to go?"

"Into two or three departments—the Dordogne, the Lot, Cantal, and Puy-de-Dôme. I will let you have all the reports, and you must compare them, and make up your mind where you had better begin. This is a confidential mission, mind, and, if successful, it will make your fortune. You shall have all the necessary authorisations, with power to requisition armed force for your assistance, and you will roll in gold when you return. Besides, you will win a deal of honour," added Fouché, with a peculiar grimace. "Come, what do you say to it?"

"I say that it comes just in time, for I was going to ask your excellency to let me start on a little journey to those parts."

"What, did you think of finding Marshal Ney and Colonel Labédoyère?"

"No, your excellency, I should not think of taking any step before the king's minister had initiated it. I merely wished to ask permission to go south for my own affairs."

"What affairs have you there?"

"I was born in those parts, your excellency."

"And you want to see your native province again? I did not know that you were a man of sentiment."

"It is not mere sentiment that makes me wish to visit Périgord."

"You wish to go to Périgord, then?"

"Yes, your excellency, to Périgueux first of all, and then into the environs."

"Very well; but what do you want to do there?" asked the minister of police.

"I wish to take possession of some inherited property," answered the spy.

"Whom have you inherited it from, and what is it worth?"

"From my uncle, your excellency, and it is worth more than two millions."

On hearing this Fouché looked at his agent, to see whether he was telling the truth or a falsehood, and in the latter case to find out his object. "You are a millionaire, then, Max!" said he, slowly. "I should never have imagined such a thing."

"I am not one yet, your excellency, and I may never be one; but I came to beg you to help me to become one."

"I am willing to do so, although I really have no great interest in it, for as soon as you become wealthy you will abandon us to run about to all sorts of gay resorts both day and night."

"You are mistaken, your excellency. I shall go on as before, and work just as well."

"Come, explain yourself more clearly," said the minister. "What do you wish me to do?"

"To give me a passport bearing a name which I will select."

"Agreed. That is easy."

"Then I wish to have a letter from your excellency, so that I may be well received by the authorities of the departments."

"I have already said that you shall have the right to avail yourself of the armed force."

"I know that very well, your excellency, and I shall do so in case of necessity, but that is not enough. I may be obliged to wear certain disguises, and to do certain things that may seem a little strange, perhaps, to the prefects and commissaries of police. If they venture to annoy me, I wish to be able to show a few lines in your excellency's handwriting approving of whatever I may do."

"Such as what, for instance ?"

"I may be obliged to become intimate with the marshal's friends, and even to conspire a little with them to help him to leave France. If any stupid functionary objected to this, he might put me in prison."

"You are right. These new men don't understand politics, and want to display a great deal of zeal. I will sign the letter."

"Thanks, your excellency."

"I will sign it upon condition that you will act openly with me. I have no desire to act in the dark, and to pay for a mere pleasure trip. I wish to be quite sure that you will fulfil your mission, and not use the money we shall allow you in looking out for your legacy."

"I flattered myself that you knew me too well to suspect me like this."

"Oh ! it is much more profitable and agreeable to run after millions than after proscribed men."

"One matter does not interfere with the other, and, if you will allow me to describe my situation and my plan to you, you will see that both matters can be carried on simultaneously."

"Go on. I am listening."

"I had the honour to tell your excellency that I wished, first of all, to go to Périgueux and its environs. It will be an excellent spot for obtaining information, as everything seems to show that the marshal and the colonel are hidden in the Dordogne or in one of the departments near by.* It is my own part of the country, and I have the great advantage of knowing almost everybody there, whereas no one knows me. I have an excellent memory, but I went away when very young, and have greatly changed. I should be very stupid or unlucky if I did not find out many useful things in a few days, for I know whom to question. There is not a man of any account in Périgueux and Quercy with whose views I am not acquainted."

"Did you not do something of this kind there formerly ?"

* Colonel Latédoyère was arrested on the 2nd of August, in Paris, whither he had come by coach from Riom in Auvergne. He was shot on the 19th of August. Marshal Ney was captured a few days later near Figeac, on the limits of the departments of the Lot and Cantal, and shot on the 7th December, in defiance of the stipulations of the capitulation of Paris.

"In February, 1811, there was a robbery of some government funds on the road from Périgueux to Sarlat. There were some nobles compromised in the affair, and the Duke of Rovigo, who sent me there, believed that it implied a reorganisation of the armed guerilla bands."

"That was just like him!" said Fouché, ironically. "I believe," he added, "that you can make a good thing out of this present business. Now, about your inheritance. How can you attend to that without neglecting your mission, and without going under your real name?"

"This is how matters stand, your excellency. When I came to Paris, ten years ago, I had an uncle who was an artillery officer, and also a rich man. He thought of making me a soldier, like himself, and I had the weakness to enter his regiment to please him. However, his sister, who was my mother, died about that time, and left me some money, which I wished to spend, and so I left the service in an 'irregular' manner."

"Come to the point! These details are useless, as I know all about you from the day when you deserted up to the time when I found you working for Rovigo, and offered to take you into my own service."

"You remember that I did not hesitate to give your excellency the preference?"

"But you kept on with Rovigo also. You always liked to eat your corn out of two cribs. Go on."

"Well, you will remember, then," continued the spy, without flinching, "that after this escapade my uncle cursed me. He had another nephew on his wife's side, who did not desert like me, for this fellow had a decided vocation for the military profession, and finally became a lieutenant. Not much of an advance, upon my word! This nephew by marriage was naturally my uncle's favourite—I forgot to tell your excellency that my uncle had become a colonel—and everybody looked upon my cousin as the heir-presumptive, and all the more so as no one knew what had become of me. However, your excellency, my dear uncle, as heaven would have it, started for Russia with his regiment in 1812, and disappeared after the disastrous retreat from Moscow. There is every probability that he was buried in the snow."

"And you are his heir-at-law?"

"His only natural heir. Unfortunately, in order to inherit, there must be documents showing that the party is dead; and my uncle's death was never registered, it appears."

"But a declaration of absence can be drawn up."

"I am trying to obtain one, but have not succeeded, although I have been at it for a year. I must tell your excellency, that I did not know how matters stood until the end of 1813, and that the return of the Bourbons made me lose three months."

"Is that all? I can recommend your affair to the tribunal."

But it isn't to congratulate the judges that you are now so desirous of going to Périgueux, I presume?"

"No, your excellency. Your protection will amply suffice to make them favourable to me."

"What do you wish, then?"

"This is what I wish, your excellency. My uncle left a kind of overseer down there who is now taking care of the property. My first step was to write to this man to tell him that I was still alive, and to win him over, and I succeeded in doing so by means of money and the promise of a large reward when I entered into possession. I was even preparing to go to visit him, when on the 20th of March I was obliged to start for Ghent. However, I kept on writing to him, and quite recently he wrote to me that I was threatened with a most unexpected misfortune."

"Has your uncle come to life again?" asked the minister, with a sneer.

"No; but it seems that he has left a will."

"A will! The deuce! does it disinherit you?"

"Oh, completely."

"Then, my poor Max, I cannot do anything for you. I have disposed, and I still dispose, of many lives, but I never set aside a will. Those things are not in my line."

"It is not necessary to set it aside, your excellency. It is only necessary to prevent its being brought forward."

"Aha! that is quite another thing."

"I must add that the existence of this cursed paper is not absolutely certain."

"Then what worries you?"

"Excuse me, your excellency, its existence is not proved, but it is extremely probable."

"Explain yourself, instead of being so mysterious," said Fouché, with a gesture of impatience.

"Well, your excellency, my deceased uncle's agent, having, as I have told you, a lively interest in my success, informed me towards the end of last month of the arrival of a certain sutler-woman, whom everybody believed to be dead, but who appeared one fine morning at Périgueux. She had come from Russia, where she had followed the 19th Artillery, the regiment which my uncle commanded, and her appearance created a great stir in the country round about, where she still has some relations who received her. The overseer, who was on the watch for any news of interest to me, promptly took measures to obtain information. He learnt that this creature was very cautious; she limited herself to saying that the colonel was dead, without entering upon any particulars as to the sad event; but she asked a great many questions about my uncle's nephew by marriage. This was natural enough, as she had known him when a child; but my correspondent, who is a very clever man, sees things afar off, and has no doubt but what the sutler-

woman holds a will by which my uncle makes his nephew by marriage his sole heir."

"I am beginning to understand," said Fouché, "and I fancy that I can be useful to you. What was your uncle's name?" he added.

"Pierre Lacaussade. I have borne several names, as your excellency is aware, but I am inscribed on the register of the parish church as Maxime Trimoulac, son of François Trimoulac and of Marie Lacaussade, his wife. Now, my uncle married a Bellefond, the aunt of my competitor, Lucien Bellefond, who is the colonel's god-son, and a lieutenant in the 25th of the Line."

"Lucien Bellefond!" repeated Fouché. "It seems to me that I know that name. Wasn't he put on half-pay at the time of the first Restoration, in 1814?"

"Yes, your excellency," replied the spy. "I must say that I admire your excellency's memory."

"When I once see a name, I never forget it, and I am sure that I have seen this name in some police report."

"That is no doubt the case, for Bellefond seems to be a kind of fanatic, and looks as though he might belong to some secret society. I had not seen him since his boyhood, but a strange chance threw him in my way on the night of the arrival of the allies, at the Café of the Rotunda, where he publicly used seditious expressions. I should never have recognised him, but the fool, who did not know me any more than I knew him, must needs pick a quarrel with me, challenge me, and give me his card."

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Yes, your excellency."

"Have you had him watched?"

"I have not yet had time for that, as our interview was so very recent. One of the men in the political brigade, however, has followed him twice by my orders. Still, he found out nothing suspicious. My cousin goes every night to the gambling-tables, but in other respects is as good as any girl."

"Then you don't think that he has anything whatever to do with the Freemasons?"

"When I was tracking them, I never saw him at their meetings, but you give me a new idea, and I must find out as to that. I have lost sight of the whole gang. I had them all in my power on the 20th of March, when Bonaparte's escapade obliged me to go to Belgium. On my return from the south of France, I will take that matter up again, if your excellency will permit it."

"Not only do I permit it, my dear fellow, but I order it, and in the meantime I may perhaps be able to rid you of the lieutenant. It is impossible that there can't be some seditious affair with which one could reproach him, and which would serve as a motive to lock him up."

"You would be doing me a great favour if you could manage that, your excellency."

"Yes, it would give you more time to find your sutler-woman, for you would not then fear that she might find your uncle's heir."

"Your excellency guesses everything," said Maxime, admiringly.

"You flatter me," said Fouché; "I cannot imagine, however, how you will prevent her from bringing your uncle's will forward, even when you do find her."

"It will be difficult, your excellency, but I can do it."

"You do not intend to suppress this interesting creature, I hope?"

"Fie! violence is not in my line, and I can assure your excellency —"

"In that case, my dear fellow, I should be obliged to act against you. My duty is to watch over the safety of his majesty's subjects, male and female alike. I do not oppose your trying to win the sutler-woman over to your own interests, however."

"That is my plan, your excellency. Mildness, mildness, that is my motto. I shall cajole my dear uncle's confidante instead of frightening her, and I'll wager that I shall make a friend of her. I shall perhaps present myself as an emissary from Lieutenant Bellefond himself. That depends upon circumstances; but, at all events, your excellency may be sure that I shall not neglect my political mission. I will even take the liberty to remark that if my presence in Périgueux should be noticed by the enemies of the government, I shall take care to let them remark my intercourse with the sutler-woman. The inheritance will be a good pretext, and explain my journey quite naturally."

"That is a good idea. All will go well if you don't make any mistakes, and don't stay too long in the Dordogne, for it is not sure that the game you are following up is there."

"My inheritance will be a secondary matter, your excellency. If I find no one in Périgueux, I will go into Quercy, and thence to Auvergne, and then return to begin the conquest of my sutler-woman. I can allow myself all the more time as to that, since your excellency deigns to let me hope that I shall be momentarily rid of my rival."

"Yes, you must leave me the necessary information as to his habits, and his residence, and I will lock him up the first time he gives any pretext for it. I should only be doing my duty in arresting him. The king's government has every interest in preventing a man who may prove troublesome from inheriting a couple of millions of which he might make the worst possible use. But are you sure that it is not too late, and that this woman has not already found your cousin?"

"I feared it was too late, your excellency, but I am now almost sure that it is not so."

"So much the better, for if they had met, or if the heir had been warned, I could not do anything to help you. It is only in exclusively political matters that I can interfere."

"I know it, your excellency ; however, the position of affairs is this : The overseer has told me of the arrival of this woman from Russia, and warned me that she has been secretly preparing to start for Paris to meet the lieutenant. He said at the same time that she did not know Bellefond's address, and yet that she must have written to him. She knows military customs, and is aware that retired officers are obliged to let their place of residence be known at the Commander's, or at the War-Office. I made my arrangements accordingly. I have this woman's name and a description of her person. I have made my best agents hunt for her in the coaches, lodging-houses, everywhere, and yet they have been running about for a week without finding her."

"She must have changed her mind about coming to Paris."

"As an extra precaution, I have had recourse to two well-known tricks. The oldest are the best, as your excellency knows. I have written to her in Lieutenant Bellefond's name. I have told her that the lieutenant, whose intimate friend I am, having accidentally learned that she meant to come from Périgueux, and being obliged to absent himself for a few days, had requested me to receive her in Paris in his place, supposing she arrived here before he returned. I gave an address——"

"Your own, of course?"

"Yes, your excellency. This, I hope, is a good mouse-trap. But the mouse may not appear. No one has yet presented herself, and indeed I despair of ever having the honour of receiving Madame Capitaine."

"Is that her name?"

"Yes, your excellency ; and her Christian name is Zenobia. With such a ridiculous name as that she is not likely to be mistaken for another person. The second plan I devised has had no better success than the first one. I thought that, before receiving my letter, or even after, if it caused any mistrust, the woman, having intended to come to Paris, and not knowing where she would lodge, might have written to Bellefond asking him to reply at the post-office. This reply would inform me fully about the lieutenant and Madame Capitaine, and I had a great desire to get hold of it."

"Were you so imprudent as to ask for it yourself at the post-office?"

"Not exactly, your excellency. I know how to disguise myself, but not as a sutler-woman. Fortunately I have some female friends who are extremely obliging. One of them consented to do me the favour of going to the post-office with me. I had previously provided her with a passport——"

"Which you induced my secretary to give you, eh?"

"Nothing escapes your excellency. These things show the great minister."

"Go on with your story."

"Well, then, your excellency, I went yesterday to the post-

office with my condescending companion, and returned there again to-day. But there was no letter for Zenobia Capitaine."

"All your inventions did you no good."

"No ; I am not ashamed to confess it ; and this morning, when I was paying my last visit to the Central Post-office in the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, a very strange thing happened to me—I was followed by an individual dressed like an old soldier, who, I saw at a glance, must be a detective. I do not remember ever having seen him here, but I was not mistaken. It was very easy to see that he was a spy."

"Oho !" said the Duke of Otranto, frowning, "can this rascal be working for the Bonapartists ? Rovigo is quite capable of having left a few agents here."

"I am inclined to think," replied Maxime Trimoulac, humbly, "that he is working for the château." *

"That may be, and I must find out. But what did you do ?"

"I amused myself by following him in my turn, to show him that I was not his dupe, and then he made off like a frightened hare. I found him again in the garden of the Tuileries, and, thanks to his disguise, I had the pleasure of setting some royalists upon him ; but, unfortunately, some officers in long coats—*real* officers—took his part and rescued him. I then lost sight of him, to my great regret."

"You must find him again."

"I will try to do so, your excellency ; but if I have to start at once for the south it will be difficult."

"You must not leave Paris till I give you fresh orders. I am waiting for more precise reports. The last announced that Labédoyère had been seen in a coach on the road between Roanne and Clermont-Ferrand, and that Marshal Ney had slept one night at Aurillac. Before the end of the week the situation will be clearer. Be ready to start at the first signal, and do not flatter yourself that you will begin by your trip to the Dordogne. It must all depend upon the information I receive."

"I am at your excellency's orders," replied the spy, as Fouché made a gesture which implied that the audience was at an end. Then, with a very low bow, he respectfully withdrew. "Upon my word !" he muttered, as he went towards the private staircase. "I am not sorry to stay in Paris a few days longer. It will give me time to receive the overseer's answer. I wrote to him yesterday to ask whether that sutler-woman was still at Périgueux."

* The Palace of the Tuileries—meaning that Saint-Privat belonged to the king's private police.—TRANS.

VII.

M. VERNÈDE's offices were always closed at five, but the banker worked on in his private room till night-fall. He was always the first at work, and did not go away till long after his cashier and clerks had retired. This laborious life left him but little leisure, and his daughter only saw him at meal-times.

Such, indeed, was the usual course of affairs at the banker's house in the Rue des Bourdonnais, but for three weeks past Thomas Vernède had worked with more diligence than ever. He scarcely took time to eat ; he passed every evening in writing, and even on Sundays he shut himself up to open his letters and verify his accounts, instead of giving that day to Thérèse, as formerly. The last walk that he had taken with her had been on the 9th of July, and they were now near the end of that sad month which had seen the victorious armies enter Paris.

On the 9th the father, the daughter, and Lucien Bellefond had dined together at a restaurant after an excursion to the country, and the lieutenant, with his heart full of hope and delight, had left his betrothed to go and win her dowry at the card-tables of Number 154. And it was on that fatal day, moreover, that had begun the painful change in the life of M. Vernède and Thérèse. Lucien had not reappeared, and his inexplicable absence grieved his friends even more than it alarmed them. On the morrow of that fatal Sunday the banker was naturally surprised at not seeing his future son-in-law reach the office at the usual hour.

On the next day but one he asked himself whether Lucien could be trying to free himself from his engagement, and he felt wounded by so strange a proceeding on the lieutenant's part. On the following day, having thought the matter over very carefully, he came to the conclusion that Lucien had met with some accident. He then went to make inquiries at his lodgings, although it cost his pride a struggle to do so. But the door-keeper of the house in the Rue des Bons-Enfants told him that the young ex-officer had not been there for three days past.

M. Vernède was in consternation at this strange news, and feared that some catastrophe had taken place. It was evident to him that Lucien had been murdered or killed in a duel ; or, at all events, compromised in some quarrel, and sent to prison. And yet this last supposition, which was more consoling than the others, was not admissible, for a prisoner can always find some way to let his friends know that he has been arrested, and in this contingency

the lieutenant would have begun by informing the banker, whose partner he was.

It was also difficult to believe that Lucien Bellefond had suddenly started for Périgord to sell his property. Why should he have made a mystery of the journey if he had decided upon it? How could he have started at night-time, at an hour when all the coaches had left, and have gone off without any baggage, too, without any clothes but those he wore? Besides, if this were a case of sudden departure, it was natural to look for a letter, and no letter came.

After twenty days of mental anguish, Thomas Vernède had come to the conclusion that Lucien was either dead or else a traitor to his vows, and the rigid financier hoped that the first supposition was correct rather than the last, for Lucien's conduct was base, indeed, if he were not dead. To fly, in order to rid himself of a spontaneous offer, and to hide himself to avoid paying the money so freely proffered, would be the act of a dishonest man. Even supposing that the young officer had imprudently agreed to furnish a sum beyond his means, he would be in duty bound to confess his own recklessness; and the banker could not admit that false shame excused culpable silence. Moreover, what was this already unpardonable fault in comparison with the crime which the lieutenant committed in driving a poor young girl to despair—a poor girl who had given him her heart, and who believed in his love?

The banker might resign himself to ruin, and revenge himself by showing his contempt for the ungrateful friend who deserted him, after having promised to save him, but the father could not pardon Lucien for killing his daughter.

For the charming Thérèse was dying of grief; she who had been so lively and so full of happiness—the tender-hearted, innocent young girl, who had never known aught of evil, and who for the first time in her life now doubted. She had gone through terrible moments of hope and fear. She had at first believed in an accident, then she had thought herself deceived, then she had believed that there had been a duel or a murder, and then again that Lucien was a traitor.

Her imagination sometimes showed her Lucien lying bleeding upon the pavement or the grass in some field; then again she beheld him at the feet of a rival, and the thought that he loved another came like a stab in her heart. However, she still loved him, and loved him too much to believe that he was dead, as her father did, and, unlike the banker, she prayed to heaven for his life. She entreated heaven to restore him to her, for she lacked the courage to bear her tortures, and her suspense was the cruellest of all suffering.

Each day added to her grief. She had no confidant save her father, and he seemed to fly from her. At first, the banker had given evasive answers to Thérèse's questions; and afterwards he had assumed an indifferent manner, which did not deceive the young

girl. When the third week came without news of the absent man, and Thomas Vernède was obliged to speak out, he simply said to his dear child, pressing her to his heart, "Forget him."

But to forget him, alas! was impossible. She could only suffer and die; and her father, who saw her slowly perishing, vainly endeavoured to hide his own anguish. The impassibility of his countenance was but a mask, and although he had lost all hope, he had not for one moment ceased trying to penetrate the mystery in which Lucien's fate was shrouded.

His friend Machefer had been immediately informed of what was going on, and by a chance as strange as the lieutenant's absence, he had been able to communicate some things which Vernède at first hoped would lead to full enlightenment. Machefer, the ex-army-purveyor, had formed certain habits which ill accorded with his new calling as a dealer in salt provision. Instead of passing the day time at his shop, and his evenings in the agreeable society of the merchants of his own neighbourhood, he often left the establishment to the control of his head shopman, and went about the city on a stroll. He almost always passed an hour or two at the quiet café in the Rue des Bourdonnais, where, through his instincts as a conspirator, he feigned to be deaf.

Thanks to this pretended infirmity, he had overheard the interesting conversation between Saint-Privat and Cornillon, and had caught the name of Lucien Bellefond. He told this to his friend Vernède, but this was all that he had to tell. The men he had heard conversing had seemed to him to belong to the police; but the fellow disguised as an old officer had only casually mentioned the lieutenant and the duel, about which the other had evidently known nothing.

From what Machefer stated, Vernède naturally concluded that Lucien had fought a duel and had been killed. But no fresh information came to confirm this supposition. The papers did not speak of anything of the kind, either because they had orders not to do so, or because the Prussian military authorities, in common with the English officers, had made up their minds to conceal the major's death.

However, Machefer, somewhat later on, learnt that various suspicious-looking people had been seen prowling around Lucien's lodgings, and he began to believe that the lieutenant's disappearance had something to do with the fact that he had belonged to the masons. For all that, Lucien Bellefond's friend had no certain information, and he now despaired of ever seeing the young officer again.

Such was the position of affairs, when one morning Thérèse entered the private room whither her father always repaired at daybreak, urged on by that feverish longing to work which had taken hold of him within the last twenty days. The young girl was terribly altered. Her cheeks had grown pale, and dark circles

surrounded her large brown eyes ; her lips no longer wore a smile. However, she was still charming, more charming than before, possibly, for grief had given her face an expression of tenderness that had not previously been apparent.

"Where are you going so early, my dear girl?" asked M. Vernède, seeing that she was dressed to go out.

"Father, I am going to pray for you," she murmured, kissing him upon the brow.

"For me?" repeated the banker, with emotion.

"For you and for him," replied Thérèse, bursting into tears.

Her father took her hand and drew her gently towards him.

"Will you let me talk with you, Thérèse?" he said, with an effort.

She had not the strength to reply, but her eyes spoke, and M. Vernède read hope as well as fear in them. "My darling child," said he, with a tenderness which he had not displayed since their troubles had begun, "promise me to be courageous, and to resign yourself——"

"He is dead!" cried the young girl in an agonised tone. "You knew it, and you were hiding it from me!"

"No, I know nothing, Thérèse; and if I ask you not to despair, it is because I suffer on account of your suffering, for I only live for you. You well know that, and you will not grieve me. If you don't take courage, if you continue to give way, you will grieve me very deeply, and it will be for the first time in your life——"

"I will try to spare you the sight of my tears," said Thérèse, "but I cannot promise not to weep. I loved him so much——"

"Remember that I need your affection more than ever, now that I have lost my friend, for Lucien was my friend, as you well know."

"I do know it, father, and I am sure that he was sincerely attached to you. How often did he tell me that he would be glad to sacrifice himself for your sake in order to prove his devotion to you!"

"He did prove it. Only lately, when I was in serious trouble—I was in despair on account of grave embarrassments—he generously offered to help me."

"Did you refuse?"

"No. I accepted, and yet I did wrong perhaps," replied M. Vernède, sadly.

"What! do you regret——"

"I regret having allowed him to mix himself up in my affairs, for I fear that it has led to his ruin."

"What do you mean?"

"Listen, my dear Thérèse. I have never spoken to you of money matters, as I wished to spare you all anxiety—all those petty worries which it is my lot to endure. I wished to make you rich without bringing upon you any of the toil from which wealth results. I made up my mind to tread the rough path alone, and I hoped to be able to say to you some day: 'We have now a fortune, be happy,

and let your old father see you happy.' However, fate has forbidden this. Reverses came upon me at the very moment when I thought that I had attained my purpose, and I was a ruined man when Lucien came to ask for you in marriage."

"You told him all, I hope?" said Thérèse, with the simple faith of a young girl who loves.

"I did, and I am happy to say that he did not hesitate. He replied that he was almost glad that my pecuniary worries should have thus enabled him to aspire to your hand, and he placed all he possessed at my disposal," replied Vernède, without attempting to hide his emotion.

"Ah! I recognise his noble nature in that."

"Alas! it did not profit him. I allowed myself to be touched by his generosity, and consented to the arrangement which he proposed. I needed a very large sum to meet my engagements; three hundred thousand francs—forgive me, my dear child, for thrusting a miserable question of money upon you now—but I must do so, for Lucien's disappearance is perhaps connected with that."

"What do you mean?"

"Lucien was to hand me this amount before the date when it must be paid, before the 11th of September—that is to say, in a few weeks' time—and to realise it he had offered to sell his estate in Périgord. Now, it is not easy to sell land in these times. Lucien may have thought it best to go away and attend to this matter himself. He may have gone into the country suddenly, without taking time to tell me."

The face of Thérèse lit up and her eyes sparkled, but this transient moment of hope was followed by deep dejection.

"No," she muttered, "no, it is impossible; he would have written in that case, he has had three weeks to do so."

This was so true, and Lucien's silence was so inadmissible a supposition, that M. Vernède could not insist.

"You see that he must be dead," exclaimed Thérèse.

"May he not have been arrested?" said the banker, with evident embarrassment. It was obvious that he did not himself believe in what he wished his daughter to suppose.

"If he were in prison," said she, "you would know it. And why should he be in prison?"

"Lucien was interested in politics."

"He was so at one time, but he promised me to give them up, and I am sure that he kept his word."

"Who knows whether he may not have conspired before he made you this promise? We are in a situation in which a man may very easily lose his liberty."

"If Lucien were in prison, he would have written to us. I tell you that he is dead, father, he is dead," repeated Thérèse, sobbing.

The banker could say nothing more. He had one more argument, that of the mysterious duel about which Machefer had spoken, but

it would have been cruel to tell Thérèse of that. All at once, however, there came to him a new idea, which was both plausible and consoling. "How do we know that he may not be in secret confinement?" said he.

"In secret confinement?"

"Yes, you do not know, my poor little girl, what that legal term applies to. A prisoner is sequestered, and forbidden all communication with friends and relatives. He is not allowed to write or receive letters. He sees no one but his jailer, and that jailer does not even answer his questions."

"If I could believe that!" said Thérèse, looking up.

"Why should you refuse to believe it? I believe it," rejoined her father.

In saying this, the banker did not speak altogether falsely, for he knew that such measures were frequently adopted at that period, and that the lieutenant, if arrested, might have been treated as a dangerous conspirator. He even decided that he would have some fresh inquiries made by Machefer, who knew very well how to follow up a clue and find out about such things as these.

"Oh, father, I beg you, do not leave me in this horrible uncertainty!" exclaimed the young girl.

"I am as desirous as you are to end it," said the banker dejectedly; "our happiness depends upon Lucien's life, for if he does not reappear, ruin and misery await us."

"It isn't poverty that I fear. If it comes, father, I shall be able to endure it. I will work for my living, if I must, and would to heaven that my doing so would restore Lucien to me!"

"I sincerely hope that you will see him again, my child. A man cannot disappear in a city like Paris without leaving some trace behind. If Lucien had been killed we should inevitably have heard of it; if he had been forced to leave Paris, he would have written to us. I conclude that he is in prison in close confinement, for I do not and cannot suppose that he has changed his mind."

"What do you mean, father?" asked the young girl, with a blush.

M. Vernède realised too late that he had spoken hastily. To let Thérèse suppose that infidelity was possible would break her heart, and he immediately endeavoured to repair his mistake.

"I mean to say," he resumed, "that Lucien is incapable of deceit; that he would not for a moment think of failing in the generous promise that he made to me; and that, even if he be under arrest, he must still consider himself my partner."

Thérèse drew a long breath. She had for a moment thought, and she was not mistaken, that her father was alluding to much more serious treachery than that.

"Yes," resumed the banker, "and I am sure that he will return before that fatal date when the money must be paid."

"Heaven hear you, father!" said the young girl, sadly. "And

now," she added, "let me go. I shall pray all the more fervently, as I shall pray for both of us."

"Are you going out alone?" asked M. Vernède.

"Yes; Marianne is growing old, and I don't wish to tire her by taking her to church with me every morning. Saint-Eustache's is not far, and I know the way," added Thérèse, with a forced smile.

The banker, happy at seeing her somewhat livelier, kissed her fondly, and said: "Go, my child, and don't stay away too long. I must see you often near me."

The girl thanked him with a warm kiss, and went away. She crossed the court-yard and went out by the arched doorway which faced the Rue des Bourdonnais. Bankers' daughters do not now-a-days run about Paris unaccompanied, and when their mothers are not with them, a maid or a footman follows behind. However, in 1815, there was less of all that, and the young girls knew very well how to take care of themselves. Besides, Thérèse Vernède was quite at home in this neighbourhood, and every one knew and respected her father, and, moreover, there was no footman in the house to go with her. She often dispensed with the company of her old nurse when she went to church, and it was without any fear that she now started off.

At that early hour there were but few pedestrians about, and when Thérèse went out she saw no one but a boy seated upon a stone in front of the banker's house. This boy was poorly clad, thin and pale, and also humpbacked. He was looking attentively at the entrance, and when he saw the young girl he rose up and came forward. Thérèse thought that the poor little fellow was going to ask her for alms, and she slipped her hand into her pocket to find her purse. To begin the day with a good action would bring her good luck; still she did not make this calculation as a workman's daughter might have done, for she was naturally charitable, and found pleasure in giving alms.

That morning, however, she did not need to follow her generous impulse, for the lad, instead of coming up to her, suddenly turned aside, as if he were going off. Had he seen her gesture, and was he humiliated by her compassion? Thérèse thought so at first, and went on without troubling herself any further about him.

If she had looked back, however, she would have seen that the little lad, after hesitating a moment, began to follow her, not as Saint-Privat followed people, but timidly and at a distance.

The young girl bent her steps towards the church of Saint-Eustache, and did not notice what was going on around her. She walked along with downcast eyes, and without noticing that those who passed her turned round to admire her elegant figure and graceful gait. Her thoughts were elsewhere. She was thinking of Lucien, and clung passionately to the last hope that her father had given her. She now pictured her lover in a dungeon, shut off from every one, watched, and chained, and ill-treated by

vile jailers, for she had no very clear idea of the tortures inflicted upon political prisoners, or of what her father meant by a secret prison.

She was thinking of delivering Lucien. The banker had promised to try and find out in what prison he was confined, but he had not spoke of trying to free him. He evidently considered that such an attempt would be idle, and did not even hope that he would soon see the captive again. Thérèse however, was far from being resigned; inaction seemed criminal to her, and she could not understand how any one could quietly wait till time or chance set her lover free.

But what could poor Thérèse do alone? Nothing, absolutely nothing, and she mourned over the powerlessness that she was forced to admit. Still, she did not renounce the hope of freeing Lucien from his persecutors, for an idea had entered her mind. She had often seen Timoleon Machefer at her father's house, and he had always been very friendly. She knew that he was acquainted with everything that had occurred, and had no doubt but that he would be disposed to help her if he were asked to do so. She therefore thought of attempting to find Lucien with his assistance.

As for her father's other conjectures, she had entirely rejected them. It seemed to her impossible that Lucien should break his word for all the wealth of the world, or that the sale of his property in Périgord could so absorb him as to make him forget his love for her. Besides, it must be admitted that the failure of her father's bank had seemed to her but a secondary misfortune. She would willingly have resigned herself to poverty if Lucien could have been restored to her; and she firmly believed that the banker felt the same generous disinterestedness. Indeed, she was not in error, for Vernède would have borne any misfortune cheerfully could he only have seen his daughter happy.

Thérèse was so absorbed in her thoughts that she walked on without noticing how far she went, and when she looked up, for the first time since starting, she found herself in front of the church. Those who had attended early mass were now leaving, and she found herself in a crowd, and was obliged to stop short to let the people passing out go by.

At ten paces from the church there stood an odd-looking, old-fashioned landau with two massive horses. A stout coachman and a footman of almost unnatural thinness completed this equipage, which would have done very well for a court-carriage prior to the Revolution.

When Thérèse caught sight of it, the footman was opening the door and letting down the steps, while a handsome young man helped a venerable-looking lady to alight. Lucien's betrothed could at first only see the back of this stylish gentleman; but when the lady had alighted, and he turned to give her his hand, Thérèse recognised him. It was the Marquis de Baffey, whom she had seen, three weeks before, in her father's private room.

Her first impulse was to enter the church to avoid being seen by him, but some persons who were coming out barred the way, and she could not move on. At the same time, to her great surprise and annoyance, she saw that the noble marquis and the dowager were coming straight towards her. The dowager was smiling and nodding very pleasantly. As for M. de Baffey, he still held his hat in his hand, and had assumed an air of the utmost respect. This couple naturally attracted the attention of the persons who were coming out of the church. They stood aside to make way for them; and Thérèse soon found herself face to face with the lieutenant's rival and the old lady, who, with her brocaded gown, her powder and paint, looked like an old fairy godmother, although she had a very distinguished air.

Mademoiselle Vernède longed to run away, but it seemed to her that it would be ridiculous to do so, and her instinct as a proud and loving girl told her that she now stood in the place of her dear Lucien, and that he would not have retreated had he encountered the proud noble, any more than the old army would have retreated before the so-called Black Musketeers. Curiosity also may have influenced her, and she may have wondered what the dowager and gentleman would have to say to her. So she remained where she was, and did not appear embarrassed. Her sufferings had given her courage, and since she had wept so much she felt less timid.

"Come here, my dear child," said the old lady, taking her hand and drawing her gently towards her. And turning to M. de Baffey: "You are right, nephew, she is charming," she added, with thoroughly aristocratic coolness.

This open praise made Thérèse blush with annoyance rather than pleasure. She withdrew her hand, and her large eyes so clearly expressed offended dignity, that the marquis hastily intervened. "Mademoiselle," said he eagerly, "the Countess des Orgeries, my aunt, has the privilege of her age, and says whatever she thinks; and I beg of you to believe that her only wish is to express the great liking which all who see you must feel at once."

On hearing this somewhat forced compliment, Thérèse looked coldly at M. de Baffey; however, she bowed to the countess.

"I know, mademoiselle," the marquis now remarked, "that this is not a convenient spot to ask for the favour of a few words with you, but I cannot find any other; I knew that you came every morning to mass; and the countess so anxiously desired to see you that——"

"That she set aside all propriety," added the dowager. "You might add, nephew, that I have no prejudices of any kind. You may as well stop making signs to me, you will not prevent me saying all I wish to her. I know everything, my dear child. I know that your name is Thérèse Verède; that your father is a banker and not a nobleman; and that he is even somewhat of a Jacobin. I know, too, that my nephew is in love with you, and is dying to marry

you. This is very foolish, is it not? and you imagine, I'll venture to say, that I shall oppose it. I might do so, for I have a hundred thousand livres a-year from my estates, and Henri will be my heir. However, I shall not oppose it now that I have seen you, mademoiselle, and I will again say that you are charming, and fit to be a marchioness. You are not noble, it is true, but my nephew has good blood enough for two; and races ought to mingle. That was Voltaire's view; and I knew him very well when I was young; and the Count de Provence, who is now Louis XVIII., was of the same way of thinking. He will sign the marriage contract, I'm sure; he can well do that, as he has made Fouché his minister. I don't mind the Revolution. My poor husband, the Count des Orgeries, lost his head by it; but I have my château and my forests; Bonaparte gave them back to me. Tell your father all that, my beauty; say that I shall call very soon to make a formal offer for your hand in the name of the Marquis Henri de Baffey, and tell your father that he will be a fool if he does not accept the proposal."

Thereupon the countess ended her strange speech, sent a kiss on the tips of her withered fingers to Thérèse, and dragged her astonished nephew back to the landau. Stupefied as well as disturbed, Lucien's betrothed went quickly towards the church, where she wished to screen herself from the curiosity of the prying folks who had been looking at this strange interview. She was already going up the steps, when she felt some one pulling her dress. As she turned, she saw the little humpback whom she had already perceived in the Rue des Bourdonnais.

During the short interview with the Countess des Orgeries, the child had leant against the wall of the church, and no one had noticed him. Still troubled by the strange words of the old lady, Thérèse did not at first heed the poor little deformed fellow, whom she had at first sight taken for a beggar. She looked at the landau, which was now driving rapidly away, and it seemed to her that she had been dreaming.

The polite gentleman and the giddy old lady who had come so early to watch for her outside the church had disappeared like a dream, and she wondered what it could all mean. However, she was soon aroused from her reflections by the voice of the little humpback, who said: "You are Mademoiselle Vernède, are you not?"

Then the young girl started; she had not expected to hear her own name spoken by this little street-Arab, and she thought that something must be amiss, that some trap was being laid for her by her father's enemies, or those of the lieutenant. There were so many people on the steps and round about the porch that she could not speak there without being overheard; and she wished to find out what the lad wanted. Accordingly, she walked towards a lonely corner of the street, and then said to the little vagabond who had followed her: "How do you know that my name is Vernède?"

"I heard the old lady say so, and that your father was a banker."

This was true. The Countess des Orgeries, in the midst of her talk, had mentioned Thérèse's surname, and the nature of her father's occupation.

"Were you not sitting on a stone over there?" asked Thérèse of the boy.

"In front of the entrance of Monsieur Vernède's house; yes, mademoiselle."

"You followed me, did you not?"

"Yes."

"Why did you wait till now to speak to me?"

"Because I wasn't sure that it was really you."

"Have you anything to say to me?"

"No. I have something to give you."

"What is it?"

"This letter," replied the humpback, taking a soiled, crumpled paper from his pocket.

Thérèse took it hesitatingly; but as soon as she looked at it she turned pale. "Lucien's handwriting!" she murmured.

And she was so overcome that she leant against the church wall to save herself from falling. The child looked at her timidly, and stepped back, probably to allow her to read the letter. With a trembling hand Thérèse opened the folded paper, which was not sealed, and then read: "Mademoiselle,—I address you this time; I ask you, you alone, what I have done to deserve complete banishment from the recollection of those whom I loved, whom I still love with all the strength of my soul——"

"He lives! he still loves me!" exclaimed the young girl. And then she again began to read through her tears, no longer tears of anguish or suspense, but tears of rapturous delight. "Your father has seen fit to leave my three letters unanswered."

"He has written to my father, and my father has concealed it from me!" ejaculated Thérèse, and then she resumed her perusal. "I know the full extent of my fault, and I do not deny that Monsieur Vernède has a perfect right to punish me for having hidden the truth from him. I ought to have told him all. If I had been frank, I should have been spared all the sufferings which my fatal resolution to win the money we needed at the gaming table has brought upon me——"

"At the gaming table! What does he mean?" muttered Thérèse, to whom these last words were unintelligible.

"However, I hoped that your father would do justice to the feeling that caused me to commit this fault, which I have cruelly expiated, for I have been between life and death for twenty days past."

"Ill! wounded!" exclaimed the young girl. "Ah! I knew very well there must be good cause for his silence, and that he had not forgotten me!" And then she read on: "Your father has

been pitiless. In spite of my urgent requests, he has refused to come to see me on my bed of pain, to listen to my justification, and to say a few indulgent words. I do not complain; and I might have the courage to remain silent if I could forget the love that fills my heart. But such a sacrifice is beyond my strength, and I shall not resign myself to it unless you force me to do so. When you yourself tell me, when you write to me with your own hand, that, like Monsieur Vernède, you refuse to forgive me, and that I am no longer anything to you, then I shall know that I only have to die."

"To die?" repeated Thérèse, with unfeigned grief; "what can he mean? What is it all about?"

"However," the letter continued, "as long as you have not spoken and pronounced my sentence, I shall still hope, for I believe in you, Thérèse, and I am sure that if you are mistress of your own actions, you will not condemn me to this disdainful silence, which is killing me. You may think that I am insane, but the thought has more than once entered my mind that Monsieur Vernède has not shown my letters to you, and that you are ignorant of the cause of my absence, and that perhaps you think me forgetful or false."

"He guessed aright; yes, I did accuse him; but when he knows all, he will say—— But let me read on": "Of all the fears that beset me, that is the cruellest! Ah! if I could only have risen and dragged myself to you, even although it cost me my life—after hearing your lips pronounce that condemnation which I dread—I should long ago have come to entreat your pardon. But, although my wounds are healing, I am still confined to my bed, and have not recovered as much strength as I should wish. I therefore write to you, and through another means than that I have resorted to till now. I trust to chance, or rather to Providence, and I feel almost sure that this letter will reach you. If I am not mistaken, you will read it and take pity upon me and reply. This is my last hope; if you have ever loved me, do not destroy it; I will wait three days, and after that I shall have done with life. Farewell, Thérèse, farewell. If I do not see you again, my last thought will still be yours."

This was all. Lucien's name was affixed to this letter, which was written with an unsteady hand. Overcome by what she had read, Thérèse first pressed her hand to her heart to still its wild throbbings, and then pressed her lips to the letter which had brought back her vanished happiness. She soon began to wonder where it had come from; and then her eyes fell upon the little messenger who had brought it. "Did you see him?" said she.

"I did not see any one, mademoiselle," replied the boy.

"But who gave you this letter, then?"

"No one. I found it."

"Found it! What do you mean?"

"I was going along a street very far from here, when suddenly

a stone fell down in front of me. I picked it up, and then saw that it was wrapped up in a paper."

"The paper that you gave me?"

"Yes; but there was another one as well, and here it is," said the humpback, handing a partially-torn paper to Thérèse.

She took it at once and read: "I beg the passer-by, into whose hands this note may fall, to carry it to its address and place it in the hands of the lady whose name is upon it. The person who does this will be performing a good action, and shall be well rewarded if he will make himself known through the *Petites Affiches*."

"You know how to read, it appears?" said Thérèse, after perusing this note.

"Yes, mademoiselle," replied the little boy, timidly, "and I saw at once what I ought to do. It was too late last night to try to bring you the letter; but this morning, early, I went to the Rue des Bourdonnais, in front of the house with the number that I had read on the address, and I waited. I did not like to go in for fear my paper might be taken from me; but when you came out I thought that you must be the person, and I followed you. When the lady mentioned your name just now, I knew that it was you."

Overcome by surprise, the young girl looked with grateful admiration at the poor little fellow who had displayed so much zeal and intelligence in carrying out a mission from a stranger, and while intending to reward him in proportion to the service he had rendered, she thought of asking him to carry her reply to Lucien. She then again glanced at her letter, but did not find what she wanted in it. Lucien had neglected to tell her where to send him the reply he was awaiting with so much impatience.

Thérèse could scarcely believe her eyes, and she turned the letter over and over to convince herself that such was really the case. She had to believe it at last, and was quite overcome with grief, when suddenly a new idea occurred to her. "Where did you find this letter?" she asked.

"In a street called the Rue d'Enfer," replied the boy. "I know the place, and I can take you there if you like."

Thérèse started at this proposition. If she listened to her first impulse, and went to the house where her betrothed was staying, with merely a boy as an escort, would not her courage fail her? Would she not do better to consult her father first? She was asking herself this question, and reproaching herself for having indulged in so bold a thought, when she suddenly remembered the contents of the letter. "Your father has been pitiless," said Lucien. "He has refused to come to me on my bed of suffering, and he has not replied, although I have written to him three times."

Lucien could not have made a false statement. Why should he have done so? Besides, his words agreed only too well with M. Vernède's ambiguous language, and the reserved answers which he had given to his daughter's pressing questions. M. Vernède knew

what Lucien had done, and had kept it from her, and would undoubtedly oppose her doing what he had not been willing to do himself. If the poor child consulted him she would have either to disobey him or to reduce Lucien to utter despair. And she naturally shrank from this alternative.

"You will take pity upon me and reply," wrote the suffering man. And he added: "This is my last hope. If you have ever loved me, do not destroy it. I will wait three days, and after that I shall have done with life."

Three days! and this might perhaps be the last, for there was no date to the letter, and it might have been written two days previously, or even earlier.

"Come," said Thérèse, "take me to the place where you picked up this paper." Her mind was made up. To save her lover she would have dared much greater dangers than crossing the city with the sole protection of a ragged humpback.

The poor boy did not require to be told twice. He looked at the young girl with his large brown eyes, which were full of intelligence, and resembled those of a faithful dog, and he began to walk ahead of her without asking anything more. It seemed as though he were sufficiently rewarded by the pleasure of serving her.

They went on thus, the girl and the humpback, without exchanging a word, till they came to the Seine, which they crossed by the Pont Neuf. Thérèse mechanically followed her guide without caring which way he went. She was thinking of Lucien exclusively, and the joy that she had experienced on learning that he was still alive and still loved her scarcely sufficed to enable her to bear the painful uncertainty which the letter now caused her to feel. She exhausted her brain in conjectures as to the events that had brought about so strange a situation, and could not understand what had led to the note being thrown into the street, where it had so fortunately been found by an honest and intelligent boy.

She realised, no doubt, that Lucien, after some mysterious adventures, which were still unexplained, had been kept away from his home and friends, that he had written explaining matters to M. Vernède, and that M. Vernède had not replied to him. But what she could not understand was that the lieutenant, even if wounded, should have been reduced to trying such means of correspondence. He must be a prisoner, since he had thrown a letter over a wall just as the famous "Man with the Iron Mask," when in his dungeon at the Isle Sainte-Marguerite, had thrown from the window a silver plate, on which his name was scratched with the point of a knife. And if Lucien were really deprived of liberty, how was it that in this letter he did not complain of his jailers, and state how he could be delivered from them? He did not do that, however; nor had he even given his address.

Finally, after great reflection, Thérèse arrived at the following conclusion: Lucien had no doubt sent full particulars to M.

Vernède when he had first written to him, and he had not thought it necessary to repeat his previous statements. On the other hand, probably urged by a vague fear that his correspondence might be intercepted, he had tried a more hazardous, but perhaps surer means. He had trusted this last message to chance, which often leads things to a good end ; but he had not cared to tell his adventures and situation to unknown persons. He had most likely thought that if the letter reached Thérèse she would ask her father for details, and even persuade him to reply.

When she had once made up her mind to this idea, she became a little calmer, and her presence of mind returning to her, she thought of questioning the boy who was guiding her. This providential messenger might be twelve or thirteen years old, but the hump with which he was afflicted made him appear older. His drawn and elongated features gave him a mature look ; his arms, which were very long, seemed as though fastened on to his rickety body haphazard, and his twisted legs ended in badly proportioned feet. However, his face was so gentle and his eyes expressed so much goodness, that Mademoiselle Vernède did not feel any repugnance as regards him ; on the contrary, she felt drawn towards him.

On the Quai-Conti, they had to cross the enemy's lines, for the Prussians were encamped there, awaiting orders for their departure to the west of France ; and the little boy now came close to the young girl, so as to prevent her passing alone through the soldiers. And although they derided the humpback, they did not attempt any gallantries with Thérèse.

It is true that they were under severe discipline, and at the corner of the Rue Dauphine the boy had stopped for an instant to read a poster which ran as follows : "The public is hereby informed that any one with reasonable cause of complaint against the Prussian soldiers, has only to apply to Colonel Pfühl, the Prussian commander of the Place de Paris, at the Hôtel de la Brieffe, No. 3 Quai Voltaire, and he will obtain full satisfaction."

The commander's quarters were not very far off, and King William's soldiers consequently behaved themselves, as they do not always do under similar circumstances.

"What is your name, my boy?" asked the young girl of the lad who had been of so much service to her in this trying emergency.

"Æsop," replied the humpback.

"What a strange name!"

"I have another ; it is Jacques. But a gentleman I waited upon used to nickname me Æsop."

"But what is your surname?"

"Oh ! I'm merely called Jacques. I have no family name, for I have no family. I'm a foundling."

"Poor little fellow!" said Thérèse. "What do you do for a livelihood?"

"Oh ! I used to be a servant at a professor's house. He taught

me to read and write. It was he who named me *Æsop*. Unfortunately he died."

"But what do you do now?"

"I live on what heaven sends me," replied the poor little fellow, reddening.

"It was the good Lord that sent you to me," said the banker's daughter. "You shall not suffer any more, I promise you."

The child did not speak, but gave her so humble and grateful a look, that she felt her sympathy for him increase still more.

Without any unpleasant adventure they at last reached the neighbourhood of the Luxembourg, and began to ascend the steep road to the Pantheon. Mademoiselle Vernède did not feel any fatigue after her long walk, but was beginning to wonder how she could manage to reach Lucien. At the first intelligence from her lover she had started off to find him almost without hesitation. The nearer she came to her journey's end, however, the more she felt that the venture was fraught with difficulties. The first point was to find the house where Lucien was, and to do this she must rely upon *Æsop's* memory and skill.

He had now brought her to the Rue d'Enfer, and as soon as he reached it, he began to walk more slowly. Thérèse saw that he was trying to find the place where the letter wrapped around the stone had fallen, and she took good care not to trouble him with questions. The street was lonely at that hour of the day, for the hot sun of the dog-days was beating down upon it; moreover, there were but few shops there at that time, and almost all the windows of the houses were closed on account of the heat.

No one remarked the beautiful young girl and the humpback, who were walking along without speaking to or even looking at one another; for *Æsop* was going along with his head up, looking at every house, while Thérèse, lost in thought, walked on with down-cast eyes.

They had reached the last houses in the street, and the humpback was still searching, when suddenly he slackened his pace, and began to look about him still more attentively. "I think that this is the spot, mademoiselle," said he at last, stopping.

Thérèse looked up, and on the right hand she saw an old house, which appeared to be deserted, for some of the windows had their panes broken, and others were closed with shutters, which looked old and weather-stained. On the left hand there was a moderately high wall, very long, and ending in a kind of a pavilion, two storeys high. This seemed to be in better condition than the house in front of it, but it was very quiet. The tall trees of the garden near by rose above the top of the wall, and swayed mournfully in the morning breeze. This nook of old Paris had the quiet aspect of a little country town, and could only be inhabited by some people of old-fashioned habits. Weeds were growing between the paving-stones, and the very sight of the old house

itself showed that the quiet inhabitants must go to bed with the chickens.

"Are you sure that this is the place?" asked the young girl of the humpback, who had taken up his position at the foot of the old garden wall.

"Yes, mademoiselle ; I am sure now," replied he. "At the first glance I did not remember the spot, because I passed here at night time, and things looked differently, but now I remember I saw the stone by the light of the street lantern over there."

"Did the stone fall here?"

"Yes, in the middle of the road. I was a little way off. At the noise it made in falling I turned round and saw the paper, which looked quite white where it lay."

"Did you see where it came from?"

"No, mademoiselle. It fell from above me, however ; that is all I can tell you."

"Perhaps it came from that house," said Thérèse, looking at the old pile on her right.

"I don't think so, mademoiselle. The windows are all broken there. It is clear that no one lives there."

"From that garden then?"

"That may be ; but then no one lives in a garden."

"But this garden must belong to the pavilion over there."

"The door is closed and so are the window shutters."

"That is no reason why there should not be some people there," replied the young girl.

Æsop was evidently waiting for her orders, but she was in no hurry to give any. The enigma was a difficult one to solve. Although they had found the place, there was nothing to show that Lucien was shut up or hidden there, and they still had to find out how they could reach him.

Thérèse had not foreseen this, and yielding to the first impulse of her love, she had followed the little humpback without troubling herself as to how she would turn the message to account. Now that she found herself face to face with these unseen difficulties, they puzzled her greatly. The wisest plan would certainly be to go to her father, show him Lucien's letter, and ask advice of his experience. But experience and wisdom have nothing to do with love, and Thérèse at that moment only obeyed the promptings of her heart.

She perhaps believed that M. Vernède had some secret rancour against the young officer, and that he would not be disposed to help her in her search. So she did not think of returning to the Rue des Bourdonnais before she had cleared up the mystery attaching to the lieutenant's disappearance.

Lucien could not be very far off, for, as the letter was in his own handwriting, the stone must certainly have been thrown by him. Thérèse was inclined to think that it had come from the garden, and she silently gazed at the old wall, which perchance hid Lucien from

her eyes. She listened to the rustling of the leaves, as though they had echoed her own name whispered by her lover's lips. But there was no sound of human voice, and she felt that to reach the lieutenant she must act and find out all she could at once.

The door nearest to the garden was that of the two-storey house which stood a few yards off, at the end of the wall. Nothing could be more simple than to knock at this door and ask for Lieutenant Bellefond as soon as it was opened. However, for a young girl, this was a daring step to take, and Mademoiselle Vernède hesitated, less, however, from fear of compromising herself than of injuring her lover. It might be that the lieutenant was kept in this secluded house against his own will, and in that case the enemies who were keeping him there would become more watchful than before if they saw any attempt made to deliver their prisoner.

Thérèse said all this to herself, and she had not yet taken any resolution, when the door of the house softly opened. A man came out, closed it quietly behind him, and then walked towards the spot where the young girl and the humpback were standing. He was an old man, wearing a blue coat, a white waistcoat, a frilled shirt, and shoes with buckles. He walked along slowly, leaning upon a bamboo cane, and looked so mild and so respectable that Thérèse felt confidence in him at once.

"Heaven has sent him to me," she thought. And without reflecting, she went up to him, and after a somewhat bashful bow inquired, blushing: "Excuse me, sir, if I ask you a question."

"Speak, mademoiselle," said the old man, looking at her fixedly.

"Can you tell me whether there is not a young man living in the house which you have just left?"

"A young man?"

"Yes, an officer—a wounded or sick man."

"Eh! don't you know which of the two?" replied the old man in a tone which utterly disconcerted Thérèse, who already felt very much frightened.

"He is wounded, I believe," stammered she.

"From fighting, no doubt, as he is an officer."

"I don't know. The person whom I am looking for was an officer, but he retired from the service."

"What is his name?"

"Lucien Bellefond," replied the young girl, who had now gone too far to draw back.

This time, the man with the white waistcoat did not show any haste about replying. He darted piercing glances at Mademoiselle Vernède, and seemed to be trying to read her very soul.

"Mademoiselle," said he, at last, "I cannot tell you. That house is not mine. I went in to buy some tulip bulbs from a gardener who is living there during the absence of the owner. I am his neighbour, for I live over there," he added, pointing to a

narrow lane at the end of the wall ; " but I don't at all know what goes on in his house. I advise you to ask him. He is very obliging, and will inform you with pleasure." This said, the old man made a friendly bow and went on.

Thérèse saw him quickly turn the corner and disappear down the narrow lane, which she had not previously remarked. She did not go after him ; what he had said as to an absent owner, and a gardener, and tulip bulbs had nothing to do with Lucien, and his look had been far from pleasant when he answered her. However, she was more determined than ever to carry out her attempt, and to question the occupant of the pavilion, let him be who he might.

" Come," said she to *Æsop*, pointing to the arched doorway by which the man in the blue coat had left the house.

" Do you wish to go in there, mademoiselle ? " asked the humpback, eagerly.

" Yes."

" I beg of you not to do so, mademoiselle."

" Why not ? " inquired Thérèse, surprised by the boy's objections.

" Because there may be some very bad people there. That gentleman had very wicked eyes."

Mademoiselle Vernède started. The same idea had occurred to her, and she was startled to hear *Æsop* express it so clearly.

" I must do so," said she, after a few moments' hesitation.

" Will you let me go instead ? "

" Let you go ? "

" Yes, mademoiselle. They won't trouble me. They will take me for a beggar ; but they may have some grudge against you."

Thérèse looked with emotion at the poor little fellow who so simply and courageously offered to expose himself to danger for her sake. She did not think that there would be any risk in knocking at the door, still there might be, and the humpback's devotion filled her eyes with tears.

" Well, I consent," said she at last, " but I mustn't lose sight of you. You mustn't go in. Do you know whom you have to ask for ? "

" Yes, mademoiselle ; I shall ask if Monsieur Lucien Bellefond lives there."

And, without waiting for fresh permission, *Æsop* ran to the door of the pavilion. Thérèse, who followed closely, saw him raise the knocker, and let it fall. The summons was quickly answered, and the door opened. Then an arm appeared which seized the humpback by the collar and lifted him in like a feather. *Æsop* vanished at once, and the heavy door was slammed after him.

The man in the blue coat, as the reader has no doubt guessed was *Saint-Privat* in his usual dress—that which he wore at his two abodes in the Rue des Moineaux and the Rue d'Enfer. After his brief but significant conversation with the banker's daughter, he had

at once thought of saving the situation. He did not know Thérèse, and could not guess who this young girl might be who was escorted by a ragged lad; however, he knew that she was looking for Lucien Bellefond, and that was enough to make him desirous of ridding himself of the annoying inquirer. For Lucien Bellefond was his hostage, and he wished to hold him.

How could he ward off the danger which the questions of the unknown girl showed him? It would not be enough to get rid of her, he must find out her intentions. It was for this reason that, with his usual cunning, he had concocted the story of the gardener and the bulbs. After this, being sure that the bait had been swallowed, he went off to direct the execution of a new plan.

At the end of the garden there was a passage, or rather a lane, so narrow that two persons could not pass along it abreast. It was owing to its narrowness that Saint-Privat had not tried to pass that way on the night of the duel, when Lucien had been removed from the cab on the folding-bed. Had the lane been wider it would have been very convenient for his purpose, for at the further end of it there was a secret door, the key of which he always kept in his pocket.

He had darted down the lane with great swiftness, and entered the garden while Thérèse was making up her mind as to what she should do. He then ran on to the vestibule of the house, and seizing Bourdache by the arm as he sat smoking in his room, he said, hastily: "Attention! some one is spying outside. Go behind the door. There will be a knock; I will pull the rope. As soon as the door opens, pop out your arm and seize hold of the girl who will be within your reach; pull her in, and shut the door before she has time to call out. After that I'll tell you what to do."

Bourdache understood passive obedience perfectly. He did not demur on receiving this strange order any more than he had demurred when his master had told him to take Lucien's bleeding body into the house. At the outset it appeared that Saint-Privat had been right in his calculations. There was a knock at the door. The latter was opened, and then Bourdache caught hold of the person who had knocked, and closed the door at once.

However, the ex-director of the dark room had an unpleasant surprise when he saw his assistant pull in the unlucky humpback. He had counted upon capturing the young girl, and was already prepared to question her.

Poor Æsop was frightened, but he did not call out, although Bourdache, who still held him by the collar, was shaking him roughly. "Throw him into the cellar!" said Saint-Privat, angrily.

The stairs leading to the cellar communicated with the vestibule, and Bourdache at once pushed the boy inside and closed the door, across which there was an iron bar.

While the servant was doing this, the master peered through an opening above the door-knocker. He saw Thérèse leaning against

the wall, and seemingly greatly frightened. He was so angry at the idea that his prize should have escaped him that for a moment he was tempted to rush out and seize her. However, a violent attack in open daylight would have been an act of great imprudence, even in that lonely neighbourhood. The young girl would scream, and her cries would bring several people out of their houses. On the other hand, it cost Saint-Privat a great deal to let her go. The questions which she had asked showed that she had something in common with Lucien Bellefond, and he would have given a great deal to know how it was she had learnt that the lieutenant was in the house.

However, Thérèse did not give him time for much deliberation. She gave a last look at the house, and then walked rapidly away in the direction of the Place Saint Michel.

"She is going for help, that is clear," muttered Saint-Privat, "and she will return."

"What, that little slip of a girl?" said Bourdache.

"Yes. She has been wandering about here with that young scamp whom you have locked up, and she asked me if an officer named Bellefond was not here. She knew that he had been wounded."

"You must not mind that, sir. She must be one of his former sweethearts. I cannot imagine how she found out that he was here. But, at all events, it does not matter, for a shop-girl won't go for a policeman to get back her lover for her."

"True; you are right, perhaps, and I am a fool to imagine all that. But never mind, I must bring matters to an end with my guest here if I wish to avoid something unpleasant. By the way, what shall we do with the little fellow in there?"

"Oh! you may be easy about him, sir; I'll keep him till to-night, and then I'll put him outside with a kick, which will teach him not to meddle with what does not concern him."

"All right; where is Julie?"

"Madame Boutard? She is in the kitchen making some jam."

"Where is my daughter?"

"Oh! you know very well, sir, that Mademoiselle Clarisse is in the studio painting the young man's picture."

"True. I left them together. What am I thinking of? But the sitting will soon be over, I hope, and I must have a serious conversation with the lieutenant this morning."

"He will come into the garden, as usual, in half-an-hour's time."

"Good! I will then tell Julie to call Clarisse and keep her beside her, if possible. She mustn't hear what I have to say to Bellefond. You must also keep a good look-out."

Bourdache replied with a gesture which was as much as to say: "Don't be alarmed; no one shall go in without my leave;" and then Saint-Privat went rapidly towards the kitchen, where Madame Boutard was attending to her household duties.

The past three weeks had been of little avail to Saint-Privat, and as regarded the colonel's inheritance, he was not much further advanced than he had been on the day after the duel fought by the heir; although he had had the pleasure of saving the latter's life, thanks to the fair Julie's careful nursing. In the first place, in spite of the spy's personal searches, and the prolonged investigations of Cornillon and his assistants, Zenobia Capitaine had not been found. Saint-Privat had even ended by feeling certain that the capricious sutler-woman had not left Périgueux, and that it was therefore useless to run after her in Paris.

On one point he had obtained some information; he now knew that the individual who had followed him to the Tuileries garden, the man who had been to ask for Zenobia's letters, belonged to the high political police. However, Nos. Fifteen and Thirty-Three of the detective force had told their comrade Cornillon very little as to this personage, who had never anything to do with them, and who was only known to them by a false name. All that they felt certain of was that he worked under the immediate orders of Fouché.

Saint-Privat had also learned that an active search for Lieutenant Bellefond was being carried on, not on account of the duel, but owing to his having belonged to a secret society, and that his lodgings in the Rue des Bons-Enfants were constantly watched, although he had not reappeared. The ex-director of the dark room felt certain, therefore, that if the mysterious official of the high political police had gone to the Central Post-Office in the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, it was because he was after Lucien, and not after the colonel's will. Probably he was not aware that such a will existed.

However, the sutler-woman's return from Russia and her connection with Lucien had no doubt been discovered by the authorities in the department of the Dordogne; and Fouché, wishing to apprehend Bellefond for conspiracy, had laid a trap for him by having a letter written to him in Zenobia's name, so as to induce him to reply at the post-office and give his present address. Feeling convinced of this, Saint-Privat had but one thing more to do. It was to proceed to Périgueux to see the woman, the famous woman who carried in her pocket Lucien's fortune and Clarisse's dowry; it was all one to our acquaintance the spy. He had long made up his mind to this journey, and had only delayed starting because he had not yet been able to carry out other designs, upon the achievement of which the success of his journey depended.

The heir had survived his wounds, and he was now on the way to complete recovery; but he had not yet signed that little contract of a private nature to which Saint-Privat had urged him to append his name on that Sunday evening when they met in the Palais-Royal gardens. And for want of this coveted signature, Saint-Privat could not begin his provincial tour for fear of "pulling the chestnuts out of the fire" so that somebody else might eat them.

VIII.

A WEEK had passed by since the duel, without Saint-Privat daring to remind Lucien Bellefond of the proposal which he had made on leaving the gambling-house. The poor lieutenant lay between life and death, and in spite of the assiduous care and skilful treatment of Madame Boutard, his wounds closed but slowly, and his strength returned more slowly still. After eight days' suffering and exhaustion he was only just beginning to improve, and he was scarcely in a condition to bear a long conversation.

For fear of fatiguing his precious invalid, our worthy friend, Saint-Privat, confined himself to slight allusions to the one subject which interested him above all else—that is to say, the colonel's inheritance.

The young ex-officer had not replied to these allusions, but he had asked for full particulars of the duel, which he had almost forgotten, owing to the repeated fainting fits which had momentarily effaced them from his memory. He had inquired more especially as to what had happened after he lost consciousness in the coach, and he had thanked Saint-Privat warmly for the care which he had taken of him. But, at the same time, he had expressed a wish to be taken to his own house.

To this his anxious host had replied that it would be not only endangering his life, which hung by a thread, but his liberty also, as the authorities were eagerly searching for the person who had killed the Prussian major.

Lucien, half-convinced, yielded for the time being, but he immediately inquired about a certain paper which he had hastily scribbled off at the moment of entering the fatal coach, and which his worthy preserver had undertaken to deliver.

To this Saint-Privat had replied that, as the paper contained a will indited in fear of approaching death, he had taken upon himself to retain it, in order to avoid alarming those for whom it was intended. And, in fact, as Lieutenant Bellefond had survived the terrible encounter, it was useless to allow his friends to become alarmed.

Lucien seemed to be satisfied with this reason, and he asked for the paper, which was given back to him; but on the same day he wrote a long letter to M. Vernède, and requested the amiable Saint-Privat to take it at once to No. 75, in the Rue des Bourdonnais. In this letter he prudently avoided entering into minute particulars. He limited himself to informing the banker that, owing to a serious accident, he was being taken care of by some hospitable persons, and that he wished he would come to see him,

He did not receive any reply, however, and after waiting a few days he wrote again, and then again. But M. Vernède still gave no sign of having heard from him.

There was an excellent reason for this silence on the part of Thérèse's father. The prudent Saint-Privat, to whom the wounded man handed these various letters, had thought fit to unseal them, read them, and then burn them. He had found nothing in them that he could turn to account, but he thus prevented an intruder from interfering with his affairs, and this to his mind was a very great advantage. He, moreover, suspected that there was some love affair at the bottom of all this, and for this reason especially he rejoiced at having succeeded in isolating Lucien.

The poor young officer, in the meantime, was greatly grieved at hearing nothing from Vernède, and, above all, from his daughter. The longer this silence lasted, the sadder he became. The wounds upon his neck and arms were visibly healing, whereas those in his heart bled more copiously every day. He did not accuse Thérèse of neglect; he preferred rather to believe that the banker was angry with him, and it did not enter his mind that his worthy protector had not delivered his letters.

Bourdache, who had undertaken to carry them, was questioned by Lucien every day, and invariably replied that he had handed the missives to M. Vernède himself.

After the third fruitless attempt to obtain tidings from his friends, Lucien fell into the deepest melancholy, and Saint-Privat took advantage of this to speak about the money left by the deceased Lacaussade. In proposing to hand the young officer the colonel's famous will, the ex-director of the dark room was not unlike the huntsman who sold the bear's skin before he had shot the bear; for he had still to find Zenobia. However, he thought himself sure of finding her at Périgueux; and, in point of fact, he was only waiting for a full understanding with the heir to start in search of her.

Unfortunately, this negotiation made no progress, and the heir showed no desire to come to an arrangement. He made some objections which were founded upon the refusal of his host to tell him what tactics he was following; and he added that there was no hurry, and that he would talk with him later on. In a word, he was evidently desirous of gaining time. He, no doubt, still hoped that M. Vernède would come to see him, and he did not wish to make any promise without having consulted him.

But this hope grew feebler and feebler, and, after waiting for three weeks, the wounded man's faith in his friend began to give way. Saint-Privat realised that this was the time to make another attempt, and he returned to the charge with renewed ardour.

Such was the position of affairs when Lucien, whose patience was now exhausted, thought of a last expedient. With the unshaken faith of love, he firmly believed that if Thérèse knew the truth she would come to see him, even if she did so against her father's will.

It was, therefore, necessary at all hazards to send a messenger to her, but how? The post was not safe in those days of political turmoil, and besides, Mademoiselle Vernède did not receive her letters direct from the postman. To tell Bourdache to take a note to the banker's daughter and deliver it to her in person would be compromising her, or at all events this course would bring about a disagreeable scene. Bourdache must now be known at the Rue des Bourdonnais, as he had already been there three times, at least so Lucien believed. He could not, therefore, be sent on a secret errand.

The wounded man thereupon resolved upon another course. He wrote a letter and wrapped it round a stone, together with a note for the passer-by who might pick up the stone, and one evening, when alone in the garden, where he was now beginning to walk about a little, he threw everything over the wall.

The reader knows what followed, but Saint-Privat did not know it; and it was only within the last five minutes that he had found out one thing, one only, which was that somebody was prowling about his house and looking for the wounded man. This was an additional reason for hurrying his negotiations forward and making strenuous efforts to bring them to a close.

"I must end all this to-day," he said to himself, as he went along the hall of the house. "I must be a fool if I fail to induce him to sign the agreement. As soon as I have my paper in my pocket, I will question the little rascal whom Bourdache has got hold of, and, according to what he tells me, I will send him off or keep him here; then I will engage a seat in the coach, and to-morrow morning I shall be off to Périgueux. During my absence Julie will continue taking care of the young man, Clarisse will keep him company; and with such allies as these, it will be strange if, when I return with the will, I don't succeed in uniting young Bellefond's million with my daughter's million."

After comforting himself with this triumphant soliloquy, the cunning old fellow quickly repaired to the room where Madame Boutard, his faithful confederate, was attending to her duties as a housekeeper.

"What! have you returned already?" exclaimed that majestic lady as he appeared.

And leaving the basins in which her jam was cooling to the charge of Carrots, she went towards the old man, who raised his finger to his lip as a sign of caution, and then beckoned to her to follow him. The room was on a level with the garden, into which Saint-Privat walked, and when at a sufficient distance from Bourdache's wife, and alone with Julie, beside a hedge, he said to her in a low tone: "Something has happened."

"I dare say something has," she replied, quickly.

"Some one has been watching the house."

"Who was it?"

"A young girl, with a ragged humpback. I have caught the boy, and put him in the cellar for the time being."

"Is the girl pretty?"

"Do you imagine that I took time to stare at her. She ran away, and——"

"So much the worse; you ought to have taken a good look at her. I'll wager that she is your officer's sweetheart."

"What makes you think that he has one?"

"It is easy to guess that. He sits for whole hours sighing and gazing up at the sky."

"But that is no reason."

"What more would you have? He is quite insensible to Clarisse's charms."

"What! do you think he doesn't find my daughter attractive?"

"I am sure of it; as sure as I am that she is madly in love with him."

"Madly in love! That is easy to say," growled Saint-Privat; "and that is just one of your hasty expressions of opinion. I will not admit, however, that Clarisse could make such a fool of herself, do you hear? At all events, if she does, it will be your fault, and I shall blame you for it."

"Very well," replied Madame Boutard, with an ironical grimace; "it was I, of course, who told your daughter to go and draw all day long in the pavilion with that handsome wounded officer, and it was I who told her to paint his portrait, and allowed her to spend whole hours alone with him."

"I had my reasons for allowing all that."

"I suppose you had, but as you have never deigned to tell them to me——"

"Come, Julie, don't be angry; I will tell them to you."

"Better late than never."

"You don't know how aptly you speak. The time has come to speak out, and I now positively need your services."

"I suspect you do. If not, you would not honour me with your confidence."

"Spare me your remarks," retorted Saint-Privat, "time is precious. You must know that I have not kept this fine fellow here for the mere pleasure of doing a charitable action."

"No, certainly not. It is all very well for your daughter to believe in your generosity, and yet I am not sure that even she does believe in it."

"Hold your tongue! You are slandering the dear child. I was saying that I had a purpose in bringing that wounded man here and in placing him under your charge."

"You did not think fit to tell me what that purpose was."

"Because I wished to have the pleasure of surprising you. Let me inform you that this lieutenant on half-pay is the heir to a fortune of two millions of francs."

"Another reason why he should not marry your daughter, who hasn't half a million," replied the incorrigible Madame Boutard.

"Excuse me! He is the heir, it is true, but in virtue of a will, and I alone know where that will is to be found. Do you understand now?"

"Oh, perfectly! You will sell him his inheritance, I suppose?"

"Yes, I shall sell it him for a million."

"Very good. That will be a million for Clarisse, will it not?"

"Exactly."

"And as one taken from two leaves one, the officer will still have a million left?"

"Yes, and you know that husband and wife should be similarly circumstanced as to fortune."

"That is why you wish to unite the two millions."

"Certainly."

"It remains to be seen whether the two millions will be willing to be united."

"They must be united, my dear Julie, they must be, do you hear me? The work is already half done, as Clarisse asks nothing better, you confess that much yourself. And I rely upon you to gain the officer's consent."

"Upon me? Why don't you attend to your own affairs yourself?"

"It will be impossible for me to do so. I am going away."

"You are going away, and when the decisive moment has come? You just said that it had arrived."

"I am going after the will."

"Where is it?"

"A long way from Paris. Still, I hope that I shall not be absent very long, but I must have two weeks at the least, and I shall confide my dearest interests to you and to you alone while I am away."

"Because you cannot do otherwise."

"No, Julie; because I know that you are devoted to me," replied the old man in a caressing tone, which made but little impression upon the whilom "Goddess of Reason."

"Well, what do you wish me to do?" she asked, dryly.

"Only something very easy. I will leave you the work all ready prepared. I need merely talk for half-an-hour with that dear Lucien in the pavilion. He is there, is he not?"

"Yes, with your daughter, who has had nine sittings from him, although the portrait is scarcely sketched."

"You see that Clarisse isn't indifferent to him, as he agrees to all she wishes."

"That's nothing; he is polite, that is all. Believe me, I know what I say. To remain so indifferent to your daughter, he must already be in love, and at his age, when a man is in love, he isn't to be won. Clarisse's charms and the million to boot will not change him."

"We shall see about that. At all events, if he is disdainful, we

shall have something to console us. All that I ask you is to watch over the two young people till I return.'

"That is very easy to say."

"And also to do, when a person has your tact and experience, my dear Julie. Be kind with Lucien and firm with Clarisse."

"I should be laughed at if I tried to be firm with her."

"No, my dear friend. I shall take good care to lecture her well before I leave. But above everything else, I desire that the wounded man shall be kept here. He has full confidence in your medical skill, and if you tell him that he needs another fortnight's rest, he will believe you. Besides, I have given instructions to Bourdache, who will not let him go out even if he tries to do so. Bourdache also has orders to suppress all letters."

"As he has done before."

"Exactly, and I rely upon your preventing any communication with outside."

"Do you think that it will be an easy matter? Besides, what do you expect to gain by all this mystery? You don't intend to sequester this young man till he consents to marry your daughter, I presume? I should not be at all surprised if the neighbours were talking already. Everything is always found out in the end. Besides, what shall I say to the handsome Lucien if he asks me certain questions. Do I even know what you have told him about yourself, your past, and your plans?"

"I told him in your hearing that my name was Bonnin, and that I had made a fortune in business. That is what Clarisse also believes, so that, fortunately, I do not run any risk of being contradicted by her. Of all my false names, it is the only one that has not been compromised in the dark room or in police affairs. You have only to follow the same tack. As for the story of the will, you are not supposed to know anything of that, nor is Clarisse. Besides, when I talk with him——"

"Here they are," interrupted Madame Boutard.

And, indeed, Lucien now appeared, leaning upon the arm of Mademoiselle Clarisse. He was coming slowly down the steps of the pavilion in which he had been living for three weeks past.

"Good! I will profit by this chance," said Saint-Privat, "but we must be alone. Find some excuse for taking my daughter away. I will see you presently, when I have talked to the young man!" And then, assuming his most amiable air, Saint-Privat went towards the young couple.

Lucien's looks were greatly changed, but his paleness suited him admirably; it gave his delicate and regular features a melancholy expression that was not usual with him, and which set them off to advantage. Clarisse, on the contrary, looked gay, and she had the fresh complexion of a person who is satisfied with life, a complexion compounded of lilies and roses, as people then said, in the flowery language of the period. She was, in truth, very beautiful, although

somewhat too tall and too plump. Had she inherited her queenly bearing from her mother, the dancer, or were her noble gait and constant smile the outcome of the skilful lessons of Madame Boutard ? On that point we cannot speak with certainty. At all events, in the days of Barras, when a full figure was so highly appreciated, she would have been thought irresistible. Her face was not very animated, but her brow and nose seemed to have been copied from a Grecian statute ; her crimson lips, when they parted, showed two rows of dazzling teeth ; her eyebrows, which were arched like those of a houri of Mahomet's paradise, her large brown eyes and luxuriant hair, black as a raven's wing, all combined to give her an imposing rather than a charming aspect, but, withal, one that was striking and calculated to attract every eye.

Her majestic person hid a sentimental heart, and even the languid beauties of a few years later were never so romantic as the tall and queenly daughter of the spy, Saint-Privat. She devoured all the novels that she could find, and the diet seemed to suit her, especially since chance had given a living form to her dreams of love. Her ideal was a man combining "the figure of Hercules with the face of Apollo," as our grandmothers were wont to say. And although Lucien did not quite correspond with this mythological programme, he came near enough to it to please the sentimental Clarisse ; and, indeed, he had completely turned her head.

He had not done so intentionally, however ; in fact, quite unconsciously, for he was completely absorbed in his love for Thérèse, and he did not notice the impression which he had made upon the tall young lady, whose glances ought to have touched his heart. That day he seemed even more indifferent than usual to the attentions shown him by Mademoiselle Bonnin, for such was the name that Saint-Privat always assumed when not engaged in his work as a spy, and consequently it was borne by Clarisse, to her great grief, for she thought it extremely commonplace.

The officer had taken her arm when she offered it, but he did not look at her, and, instead of feasting his eyes upon her charms, he walked along with his head down, as though he were thinking of anything but making love to his companion.

"Good-day, my dear convalescent," said Saint-Privat, going to meet him.

"Good-day, my dear host," replied Lucien, somewhat coldly.

"Your strength seems to be returning very rapidly," resumed the old man ; "and I'll wager that you do not really need my daughter's arm."

"I am abusing her kindness, that is true," said the young man, releasing himself from her support.

If Saint-Privat had been trying to afford the lieutenant a chance of being attentive to Clarisse, he had entirely failed.

That handsome young woman gave her father an angry glance, and then mincingly remarked : "Ah, sir, I am very happy to

assist you, and I am sorry that my father has made you drop my arm!"

"Such was not my intention," stammered Saint-Privat.

"Monsieur Lucien has all the more need of it, as he has had a long and tiresome sitting this morning," resumed Clarisse. "Two hours! Only think! But the picture is progressing. It is true that I paint with pleasure. It all depends upon the model. I spent a whole month in copying the bust of Socrates; but I am succeeding very well with the head of Romulus in the copy of David's 'Rape of the Sabines,' and I think that Monsieur *de Bellefond* is extremely like Romulus."

Mademoiselle Clarisse was very fond of giving a "*de*" to those who pleased her, and thus making aristocrats of them; however, like her father, she failed in the effect which she wished to produce.

"My name is Bellefond without the *de*," said the young officer.

"And it is worth all the titles in the world," remarked Saint-Privat. "When a man has fought gloriously upon the battlefield, that suffices—

'He needs no ancestry who serves his country well.'

Was it not the great, the immortal Voltaire who said that? But come, my dear friend, sit down in this arbour under the shade of the creepers. That is your favourite place, I know, and I see that Bourdache has placed your arm-chair there, with a seat for me. He seems to have guessed that I should come here this morning to have a talk with you."

"It was not Bourdache, it was I who placed the seats there," said Clarisse, eagerly. "Monsieur Lucien is kind enough to listen to my reading, and to-day I chose a book by Madame Cottin, my favourite author. It is called '*Matilde and Malek-Adel*,' and it is charming, is it not, sir?"

"Delightful is the word, mademoiselle," said the lieutenant, in a tone which completely belied his true opinion of the fashionable literature of the day.

"The character of the young Saracen warrior particularly charms me," resumed the young lady, with an expressive glance.

Saint-Privat saw that his daughter's taste for young warriors, Saracen or other, was being too plainly expressed, and he desired to put an end to her effusions. "My dear child," said he, gently, "Monsieur Bellefond needs rest, and reading may tire him. I also think that Julie wants to consult you."

"About the amount of sugar to put in the jam?" said Clarisse, crossly. "You know very well that I don't understand such things."

"No, mademoiselle," said Madame Boutard, gravely; "it is not about jam that I wish to speak. I have something to say to you from your father."

"My father can speak to me himself, it seems to me, and——"

"My dear Clarisse, I wish to speak to our invalid just at this

moment," interrupted Saint-Privat, "and if you wish to please me you will leave us alone. Oh! it will not be long—a few moments, half an hour at the most."

"Very well; I will go," rejoined the beauty, with a look of vexation.

And angrily closing the book which she had already opened, she turned away to conceal her flushed face, hurrying off towards the pavilion, whither Madame Boutard made haste to follow her."

"She is a little self-willed and romantic, but all that will disappear when she is married," said Saint-Privat, looking after her lovingly as she went off.

"Mademoiselle Bonnin is charming," said Lucien, gravely; "but did you not say, my dear sir, that you wished to talk to me?"

"Yes; I wish to speak to you of an important matter which it would not have been proper to mention before that child."

"Very good; it suits me exactly, for I also wish to speak to you seriously."

"We can chat here at our ease. Be kind enough to sit in that chair, my dear friend, and promise me, first of all, to stop talking as soon as you feel the slightest fatigue. I desire, above all things, to spare your precious health, as you know."

"Do not alarm yourself, sir; I am quite strong enough to talk, and even to leave this house and put an end to all the worry I am giving you."

"Leave this house! Can you be thinking of such a thing, my dear friend?"

"I have been thinking of it a great deal, and I should have gone already if my wounds had permitted it. However, I feel now that I am quite able to do so."

"You are mistaken. Madame Boutard, who knows all about such things, was saying just now to me that you would not be able to move for three weeks to come, and that the least imprudence on your part would be followed by serious consequences."

"I do not dispute Madame Boutard's experience or skill, my dear host; but she is not infallible, I presume, and I shall soon show her that she is mistaken."

"What! do you really wish to leave us? I cannot believe it."

"It is my firm resolve to do so, however."

"You grieve me, my dear Lucien, and I cannot understand. Can it be that you have anything to complain of here? Has any one been wanting in attention?"

"No, indeed; every one is most attentive to me."

"Perhaps too much so? You may have been annoyed with too much attention! I know what an excess of zeal is, and if you have anything of that kind to complain of, I assure you, my dear Bellefond, that nothing would prevent me——"

"No, no; it is not that."

"What is it, then? You cannot imagine how you grieve me. I have been so used to seeing you every day that it has almost seemed to

me, I assure you, that you were one of the family ; and I cannot get accustomed to the thought of losing you."

"My dear host, I do not doubt the interest which you take in me, but you must not exaggerate. Our first meeting occurred but a month ago, or even less, and three weeks since you received me here with a kindness that I shall never forget. That is amply sufficient to attach me to you by ties of gratitude. Still, it is not enough to make me give up my former acquaintances or to break off relations to which I attach great importance, and which I had formed long before I had the good fortune to know you."

"You mean with the person to whom you wrote several times, and to whom you bequeathed your fortune when you got into that fatal coach?"

"No doubt," said Lucien, straightening himself up in his chair.

Saint-Privat, who was seated in front of him on a straw-bottomed chair, took his hand affectionately, and replied with a deep sigh: "Alas! my dear friend, I fear that those persons are less kindly disposed towards you than you suppose. I fear that they do not wish to renew the intercourse which your unfortunate duel so suddenly broke off."

"What do you know about it?" said Lucien, curtly.

"I do not positively know anything; but I do not need any better proof than their neglecting to reply to you," said Clarissé's father, with a dejected air.

The lieutenant, who felt the force of this argument, could not help hanging his head; and Saint-Privat, so as to turn the effect which he had produced to account, at once added: "My friend, heaven forbid that I should try to surprise your secrets. You are free to place your affections where you please, and to think that your friends are faithful. But I cannot help reminding you that you have written three times, and that your letters have been regularly handed to those to whom they were addressed, and received by them, and that not only they have not called upon you, but they have not even given you the slightest sign of their existence. Believe me, my dear child," added the old scamp, in a paternal tone, "I have great experience of life, and I know what human weakness is. There are no friends when trouble comes. Your friends were devoted to you, I do not doubt it; but devotion has its limits, and now that they know that the police are looking for you, and that you are accused of belonging to a secret society, they are less anxious than formerly to keep up an acquaintance that can only compromise them seriously."

"You are mistaken, I assure you," said Lucien, earnestly. "My friends may have deserted me, but not for the cowardly motive which you ascribe to them."

"Whatever their motive may be, I am sure that they will return to you eagerly if they learn that you are free, and not worried by the police, but enjoying a large fortune instead."

"That is all very well," interrupted the wounded man, impatiently; "but what are you aiming at?"

"I wish to remind you, my dear Lucien, that it depends upon you to become the possessor of that fortune."

"Good! you wish to talk about that will again."

"And what could be of more interest to you, my friend? Remember that two millions were left to you by your uncle."

"And you want your share of them? I know that."

"Why should I deny it? Business is business. I am only a trader—a poor trader, who has with difficulty amassed a petty competence."

"And you wish to become rich at one stroke. This is a pretty kind of trade, my dear host!"

Clarisse's father did not appear to be offended by this irony. However, he paused for an instant as though he were about to take up a delicate subject. "I am aware," said he, at last, "that appearances are against me, and that at the outset my proposals made you distrust me. When, after looking for you so long, I finally had the pleasure of meeting you in the garden of the Palais-Royal, I saw that you took me for one of those low-bred speculators who wish to trade upon false hopes."

"You must confess that this story of having found a will—this story which you so suddenly told me, was calculated to surprise me."

"I am quite willing to admit that, and I expected all sorts of objections on your part when I accosted you, still I knew that I could remove them. Unfortunately, I had not time to do so that night, and we suddenly found ourselves in the midst of the most astounding adventure imaginable."

"That is true, and I admit that it was I alone who dragged you into it. I am even willing to admit that but for you I should not have survived. If you had not brought me here, I should have died from loss of blood, or if I had survived my wounds, I should have fallen into the hands of my political enemies, and once cured, I should have been court-martialled or otherwise prosecuted."

"I did no more than my duty," replied Saint-Privat, modestly; "but as you speak of your political enemies, let me remind you that we have had some trouble here in hiding you from them, and that if you were so imprudent as to return to your lodgings, you would certainly be arrested."

"Be easy, my dear host; when I leave here I shall take proper precautions. But let us return, if you please, to the offer which you made me. You say that if this duel had not taken place you would have given me satisfactory explanations. I am still waiting for them."

"That is no fault of mine; I have several times attempted to explain matters to you, but you have invariably made some excuse or other for not listening."

"I undoubtedly had my reasons for doing so."

"Your reasons? Yes; I think that I can guess them. In the first place, you have but little faith in my sincerity, and you do not wish to enter into any engagement with me until you have consulted the persons to whom you wrote. Isn't that true?"

"Perhaps so; however, continue."

"Well, then, as these persons have not replied to you, you have no advice to expect from them; and nothing, it seems to me, need any longer prevent you from making up your mind. You know my terms. I have but one word, and I keep it. If the terms suit you, as I hope, we can settle everything at once. I have prepared a little paper, which I will read you."

"It stipulates that you wish for the round sum of a million, does it not?"

Saint-Privat nodded.

"A million, which you will earn by the stroke of a pen," said Lucien.

"The stroke of a pen! Ah, my dear boy, it is easy to see that you do not know what it costs to conduct an affair of this kind," said Saint-Privat. "What if I told you that for an entire year I have spared neither time nor pains; what if I enumerated the steps that I have been obliged to take in this matter—the journeys and the dangers?"

"All that, and more, can be done for less than a million; however, you talk of journeys and dangers. Would you have me believe that you journeyed to the frozen marshes of Russia to find my uncle's will?"

"No, no; that is not what I mean."

"Ah! so much the better; for it would be contradicting what you yourself said, for you admitted in the garden of the Palais-Royal that the will was not in your hands."

"That is true; but I added that I knew where it was."

"Very well; and you naturally refused to tell me where the precious paper was."

"It depends upon you to know that very soon."

"By signing your little contract, I presume?"

"Yes."

"And if I sign it, will you hand me the will at once?"

Saint-Privat reflected for an instant, and replied: "Honesty obliges me to say no. I promise to hand it to you very soon, but I cannot fix the day. You risk nothing, however, as you will not owe me the million until you obtain possession of the Lacauassade property. My frankness is the proof of my good faith; and to show you that all this is but a question of honesty between us, I will make no difficulty about declaring to you that the validity of such a paper as I ask you to sign might be disputed in court. I rely less, however, upon a stamped paper than upon your word of honour. When you have given me that, I shall feel positively sure that you will keep our little agreement."

This little discourse, warmly spoken, made some impression upon Lucien Bellefond, and he could not help allowing this to be seen.

"Listen, my dear boy," resumed Saint-Privat, eager to take advantage of this first success; "I will not try to influence your decision; still less to force it. You are free to accept or reject my proposition, which I believe to be fair. If you refuse to treat, I shall, without very much regret, relinquish my hopes; this matter would, however, secure the repose of my old age, and I may also say the happiness of my daughter, who could then marry according to my wishes. Still, I shall give it all up, and I hope that we shall still remain good friends, for you cannot blame me for taking care of my dear Clarisse's interests. If, on the contrary, you accept, oh! then I shall keep nothing from you. I will tell you all, and from that moment I will confide all my hopes and plans to you. I shall be obliged to absent myself for two or three weeks, and, in the meantime, I hope with all my heart that you will consent to remain here. I ask it as a favour, and in your own interest entirely, so as to prevent you from falling into the hands of the political police, who are watching your lodgings."

"And when you return will you bring the will with you?"

"I will, do not doubt that; and, what is more, I will arrange matters with the police on your behalf. I did a favour once to an influential man at the Ministry of the Interior, and he will not refuse me his support to have your name taken off the list of suspected persons. I shall make it a plea that you have become a millionaire, and that millionaires never conspire."

Lucien was not listening very attentively as to what Saint-Privat was saying as to the influence he possessed in governmental regions. He was lost in deep and painful meditation, which did not relate to the colonel's will. He was thinking of M. Vernède, who was angry with him, and of Thérèse, who had forgotten him, since even she did not reply to him.

He no longer counted upon the success of his scheme of the night before, and he despaired of being again received at the Rue des Bourdonnais, for it seemed to him that the banker would never forgive him for having deceived him, and that his daughter also would show no pity for a gambler and duellist. In this state of discouragement he did not care whether he remained or not in Saint-Privat's house until the latter's return. What did it matter whether he accepted his offer and gave him a million as the price of his services? If the old man spoke truly, Lucien would still have an enormous fortune left him, and he wished to revenge himself upon M. Vernède by offering it to him.

Clarisse's father seemed to read all these thoughts in Lucien's face, for, without adding a word to his promises, he took a paper from his pocket-book, unfolded it, and held it out to him. Lucien took it, and Saint-Privat then produced a little horn case which contained pen and ink. He opened this and waited. M. Lacaus-

sade's nephew then read the paper rapidly, took the pen from Saint-Privat, who politely held it out, and signed the document hurriedly, perhaps to avoid reflecting.

"My dear boy, I thank you, I thank you for having had confidence in me," exclaimed Saint-Privat, putting the paper carefully away. "You shall not repent it, I swear to you. And now," added he, taking both of his hands, "do you give me your word of honour as a soldier to keep the engagement you have signed?"

"I give it to you," replied Lucien, somewhat scornfully.

He had scarcely spoken the words demanded, when the leaves rustled above his head, and a stone fell at his feet.

"What is that?" exclaimed Saint-Privat, rising in alarm. "Who can be throwing stones at us?" And he at once stooped down to take up the projectile.

However, with a vigour and rapidity of which no one would have thought him capable, Lucien pushed the old fellow aside, and picked up the stone, which had fallen at his feet. He had seen at once that it was wrapped in a paper, and something told him that it had brought him a message in reply to the one which he had thrown over the wall the night before.

It was natural enough that this means of correspondence should be resorted to, as he had made use of it successfully; and so it was with lively emotion that he unfolded the paper.

"What are you doing, my dear friend?" asked Clarisse's father, with a frightened look.

"You see," said the wounded man, "I am opening my correspondence."

"What?"

"Yes, this is a letter."

"A letter! but that letter may be a trap," urged Saint-Privat.

"What nonsense!"

"In your place, I should not read it."

"You might not; but I shall do so," replied Lucien, firmly, and looking straight into Saint-Privat's face. "I am free to do as I please, I presume?"

"Can you doubt that, my dear friend?" replied Saint-Privat, quite losing countenance.

He did not know what was the crumpled paper which the officer held in his hand, but he feared that it came from some enemy to his projects. He even thought that the young girl who had been wandering about the house had had a hand in throwing it over the wall.

He was not mistaken, for Lucien had given a start of delight. He had recognised Thérèse's handwriting, and was reading eagerly.

The ex-director of the dark room noted all the various signs of emotion which appeared on his face. He detected surprise, joy, and indignation succeeding one another; and finally he realised that this last feeling was stronger than any other.

Lucien, after rapidly finishing his perusal, gave the old scoundrel

a look which almost made him sink into the earth, and demanded in a loud voice : " What did you do with my letters ? "

" Your letters ? " said Saint-Privat.

" Yes. The letters which you undertook to take to the Rue des Bourdonnais ? "

" They were delivered, I swear to you. "

" You lie ! "

" But, I assure—— "

" You lie, I tell you ! Where are they ? Answer me ! "

" I—I do not know. I will ask Bourdache. "

" It is idle to do that. I will tell you what became of them. Your worthy servant gave them to you, as you told him to do. You read them, and then you burned them, or threw them away. "

" Who can have told you such—— "

" Some one who knew, it appears. You do not reply. Then you confess it, eh ? "

Saint-Privat was as pale as death, and he remained silent. With his usual sagacity he had guessed at once that the letter which denounced him must have come from the gentleman in the Rue des Bourdonnais, who complained of having received no news from Lucien, and he felt that there was no possibility of denying such proof as that. He certainly could not understand how the wounded man's friends had found out that he was hidden in a lonely house in the Rue d'Enfer ; but he clearly realised that the time had come for confessing at least a part of what he had done.

" Well, yes, " he exclaimed, suddenly, " I confess it. I took upon myself to destroy those letters. Why should I deny it ? I have been on the point of telling you so twenty times already, but in the state you were in I was afraid of agitating you too much. "

" Touching solicitude, I must say ! I cannot thank you enough ! " retorted Lucien, harshly.

" I beg of you, do not condemn me without hearing. Remember that, owing to the course affairs had taken, I was charged with watching over you, and I considered myself responsible for any consequences that might result from imprudence, and it was a great imprudence to write even to a friend. That friend had to be kept in ignorance of the fact that the police were looking for you, that your lodgings in the Rue des Bons-Enfants were being watched, and that the least indiscretion on your part might do you a great deal of harm. In a word—— "

" Enough ! " interrupted Lucien. " Spare me your clumsy falsehoods. I know the true motive that led you to commit this infamous act. You wished to keep me in your own power until you were able to hand me my uncle's will and share his money with me. You were afraid to let me communicate with my friends, because they might have dissuaded me from entering into this bargain. "

" It is concluded now, " said Saint-Privat, eagerly ; for the paper was now safely signed and in his pocket.

"Then as Lucien shrugged his shoulders, he added : "Besides, I have your word, which is better than all the papers in the world."

"I know that," rejoined Lucien, contemptuously. "You might have dispensed with asking me to give it. I should not have disputed the value of the written engagement which you have made me sign, and even now I shall not dispute it."

Saint-Privat could not restrain a gesture of delight.

"Yes," resumed Lucien, "you are free to run after this fortune, of which you have asked so large a portion for yourself. When you bring me the will, if it really exists—when you are able to bring it to me, I will give you your promised wages, and then all will be at an end between us. But in the meantime, you won't be surprised if I refuse to remain any longer with a man who has so basely deceived me."

"What! would you leave me? No, it is impossible. You would not grieve me—grieve us all so much. You must remain, at least till I return."

"Not a day, not an hour!" replied Lucien, abruptly rising.

"But in your present condition you may bring on a relapse."

"No matter! What does it matter to you? I am going."

"Going! But you must not go. It is madness; and I should be acting wrongly if I allowed you to risk your health in this way."

"Do you mean to try and keep me here by force?"

"By force? no, certainly not. But I must warn you of the consequences of such folly, and do all that I can to prevent it, and even oppose it, by persuasion, in the first place—"

"No nonsense! You wish to prevent me from leaving this place, that is perfectly clear. Now, listen! The stone that I hold in my hand did not fall from the sky. Those who threw it know that I am in your house, and they are there in the street on the other side of the wall. I only have to call out to them for them to hear me. It will suffice if I raise my voice. Now I declare to you that if you do not instantly open the door of this house, I will call for help, and I'll answer for it that they will not hesitate about bringing the police here."

"You would never do that!" exclaimed Saint-Privat, in terror.

"I have made up my mind to do it; and I shall not wait a moment longer," said the lieutenant, in so resolute a tone that the old man realised that it was of no use to oppose him any longer.

"I must yield to you," he sighed; "but if anything happens to you, I shall not be responsible. I must ask you to promise, too, that I shall not be annoyed on your account."

"I promise you that, in the name of my friends and my own."

"And I must also ask you where I shall find you when I have to hand you the will."

"You must come and ask for me at Monsieur Vernède's house in the Rue des Bourdonnais, Number 75."

"The man to whom those letters were addressed?" said Saint-Privat, in alarm.

"Exactly. He is a man from whom I have no secrets, and I shall tell him of our agreement. You can come to his house, and you will find your match there. Now," added Lucien, "let there be an end to all this. You must accompany me, and give orders to the fellow who takes charge of your house to let me pass. However, that is not all——"

"What more is there?"

"You have seized and shut up a boy who knocked at the door a short time ago."

"A boy!" repeated Saint-Privat, in amazement. He did not understand how his prisoner could be so well informed, unless there were witchcraft in it all.

"Yes," resumed the young ex-officer, "a boy whom you must deliver up to me at once."

"It wasn't I who did that, it must have been that brute of a Bourdache."

"No matter; I want that boy. Come, give me your arm and take me to the limits of your domain," said Lucien, in a mocking tone.

Saint-Privat was conquered. He realised it, and submitted with as good grace as was possible under the circumstances. Lucien leant upon his arm as he crossed the garden, and had only some friendly reproaches to put up with on the way.

"To go off like this, in your invalid's dress, and without even taking time to change your clothes and say good-bye. Ah! my dear friend, my daughter Clarisse will reproach me bitterly for not having kept you, at least till she had finished your portrait," said the old scoundrel.

"Mademoiselle Clarisse will console herself by copying the head of Romulus once more," rejoined the officer, in an ironical tone.

Saint-Privat felt that he must resign himself, and he tried to put a good face upon the matter. They reached the vestibule without meeting anybody, and found Bourdache there smoking his pipe.

It would be difficult to depict the astonishment of the Cerberus when he heard his master order him to fetch the humpback from the cellar. He obeyed, however, and produced poor *Æsop*, who was still quite bewildered by the confinement in which he had been kept.

To finish with all discussion, Saint-Privat opened the door himself, and made a show of embracing Lucien, who repulsed him, however, took the child by the hand, and then went out.

"Bah!" growled the excellent father, when the door closed upon the departing prisoners, "Clarisse has lost a husband, perhaps, but she has gained a fine dowry at all events. I have the paper, and now I am ready to meet Madame Zenobia!"

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WHERE'S ZENOBIA?

IX.

WHEN Lucien found himself in the street, he felt that his strength would not hold out, and he leant for a moment against the garden wall. The boy, who had thus suddenly emerged from the darkness in the cellar, was dazzled by the blinding sunlight, and suffered his deliverer to drag him along without uttering a word.

However, great as was his astonishment, that of the officer was still greater upon failing to see Thérèse, whom he had expected to find in the street. And yet the letter was from her.

He still held it in his hand, and began to read it again. "Your messages have never reached my father," said the young girl's note, which appeared to have been written in great haste. "The one which you sent me by the means that you know of was handed to me by a boy, who accompanied me to the house where you are detained. He knocked at the door, and was seized and dragged in. I went to fetch help, and to write this note, which I hope you will find when I have thrown it into the garden. If you receive it, come out if you can. Your friends beg of you to do so. They are waiting for you; and if the day passes by without you relieving them of their anxiety, they will take other means of delivering you, for they do not doubt but that you are detained against your will. Courage and hope."

There was no signature to this, but Lucien had at once recognised the handwriting, and felt certain that Thérèse herself had thrown the stone over the wall. His heart was overflowing with joy, although there was a great deal that he did not understand in all this. He realised one thing, however, that his betrothed still loved him, and that he was about to see her again. Where and how? He was beginning to ask himself this question when he suddenly thought of questioning the lad whom he had rescued from Saint-Privat and his hirelings.

"Youngster," said he, gently, "it was you, was it not, who picked up a stone at the foot of this wall?"

"Yes, sir, a stone wrapped up in some paper. I read what was written on the paper, and I took the note to the lady this morning?"

"And she came here with you?"

"Yes, sir; and, as we met an old gentleman coming out of the house, the lady asked him if Monsieur Lucien Bellefond lived here, but he said that he did not know, and then he went away."

"It was that wretch Bonnin, no doubt," muttered Lucien. "Go on!"

"Then the lady wanted to knock at the door; but I was afraid to let her do it, and so I——"

"Yes, it was you who knocked; and those rascals took hold of you. But she did not tell you what she was going to do?"

"She did not have time to do so, sir. She must have been as much surprised as I was when they caught me."

"Yes," muttered Lucien; "and then she went in search of some one to deliver me. But how is it that there is no one here?"

The street was empty; there was merely a hackney coach standing at fifty paces or so from the narrow lane at the end of the garden.

The lieutenant realised that he could not remain where he was, and thought that, if the coach were not hired, it would suit him to take it, for he was unable to walk. However, he did not know what address to give to the driver.

To return to his lodgings in the Rue des Bons-Enfants would be very imprudent, according to Saint-Privat, and he had no reason to doubt the spy's assertions in that respect. To go straight to M. Vernède was what Lucien did not dare to do.

He must go somewhere, however, and take with him the poor little fellow of whom Mademoiselle Vernède had spoken in her note.

"You must stay with me, my lad," said he, laying his hand on the humpback's shoulder.

"Yes, sir," said Esop at once, "and you can lean upon me. Do not be afraid of tiring me. I am not very strong, but I will help you, for all that."

Lucien thanked him with a smile, and went on, leaning on the good little fellow to help himself along. He took care to look back, but he saw that the door of the house remained closed, so that his host had no thought of following him. He listened, also, as he went past the wall over which the letters had passed so luckily, but he heard neither the old man's voice nor that of the fair Clarisse.

If any scene were taking place between Saint-Privat and his daughter, it was with closed doors—unless, indeed, Madame Boutard had already lectured the young lady enough to silence her.

As Lucien went up to the coach he saw with no little regret that it was taken, for the driver was speaking to some one inside. Moreover, as he drew nearer he saw a head at the door.

"Well," said he, philosophically, "it seems that I must walk to the Place Saint-Michel; there I shall no doubt find a vehicle."

And he continued walking on with some difficulty.

He was soon alongside of the coach, which he almost touched, and was proceeding onward when the door suddenly opened. "Get in!" called out a voice which he thought he recognised.

He then stopped short, and saw with amazement the pleasant face of his friend Machefer at the door of the coach. The expurveyor laughed, and at the same time held out his hand. It was no time to ask for an explanation. However, Lucien did not wish to desert the poor lad whom he had rescued, so he pointed him out to Machefer, who at once remarked: "Make the boy get in as well."

Æsop did not need to be urged. He quickly entered the coach, and the invalid then followed, with Machefer's help.

"Then it is to you," began Lucien, "that I owe——"

"Stop a moment, we will talk presently," said his friend, as the young fellow flung himself into his arms. And popping his head out, he called to the driver: "Drive to the Rue du Jour, at the corner of the Rue Montmartre."

"We are going to your house, then?" asked Lucien.

"Yes, of course, and for very good reasons, too. If you tried to go home, you would sleep in prison to-night; and, on the other hand, I don't advise you to go to our friend Vernède's at once."

"It is true, then! he hates me and despises me, and looks upon me as a traitor?"

"No, no; you are going too fast! However, he blames you for your sudden disappearance, and to win his pardon you must explain matters."

"Then she hasn't done so?"

"If by *she* you mean the charming Thérèse, she hasn't. You are surprised that she has not yet told her father all, eh? You expect too much, then. It seems to me that she hasn't lost her time, and that what she did was well done. Let us go back a little, I must explain matters to you. This morning Mademoiselle Vernède was accosted by this little fellow just as she was going to mass. He gave her your letter, which he had picked up on the night before. She followed him to the Rue d'Enfer at once, to inquire for you. She then addressed herself to those who were keeping you in that house. You know what happened. Her messenger was captured, and she narrowly escaped being caught herself. However, she succeeded in getting away, and had the good sense to come and tell everything to your old friend, Timoleon Machefer. It was I who thought it best to throw the reply over the wall."

"It was you, then——"

"Yes, I took the chances of doing so. If I had not succeeded, I should have thought of some other plan. But I did not wish Thérèse to do this herself, and I asked her to let me do it in her place. It was more prudent. Now, let me tell you, Mademoiselle Vernède never ceased to believe that if you did not return it was because you were prevented from doing so, and she always took your part with her father."

"Ah! I knew very well that he blamed me."

"There was a good reason for it, my dear friend. No father

could see his future son-in-law suddenly disappear, and remain away for three weeks without a word, and yet not blame him."

"He will never forgive me, I fear," sighed Lucien.

"I think that he will, for you have an excellent lawyer to plead your cause, and at this very moment, too."

"Do you mean Thérèse?"

"Yes, Thérèse. When she left my house she went home."

"Ah, I hoped that I should see her," murmured Lucien.

"You selfish fellow!" exclaimed Machefer, with a laugh. "You were complaining that you had got into trouble with our friend Vernède, and now that you know you are being defended, you still complain. What else can you desire?"

"I desire to thank you, my kind friend," said Lucien, warmly, "and to tell you my story, so that you may know how I became the victim of fatality."

"Hush!" said the purveyor, putting his finger to his lip. "I also have many things to acquaint you with, but we will talk of all that presently at my house. Tell me, little boy," he added, addressing the humpback, "do you wish to work for your living?"

"Oh, yes, sir, I should be very glad to do so, but I am so weak!"

"No matter. You can read, it appears?"

"And write, too, sir."

"Well, then, I will take charge of you. I will place you in my shop, in the orange department. You can register the boxes from Valencia and Portugal. That's settled; but not a word to my clerks as to how we became acquainted." Then, as the humpback was about to thank him, Machefer added: "Be silent! We have reached the house."

The coach had gone along very rapidly, and they had arrived before Lucien had thought of it.

The shop was on the ground-floor of an old house, in poor condition, but good enough to be used for commercial purposes, and still quite habitable. It was at least two hundred and fifty years old, and had two fronts and two entrances. In the Rue Montmartre was the shop itself, full of oranges and lemons, almonds, barrels of anchovies, and tuns of herrings and dried salted cod. There was a brisk business going on, for Timoleon Machefer's affairs prospered and grew better every day.

Above, on the first floor, there was the office and the cashier's room, which communicated with the shop by an inner staircase.

The private apartments of the dealer were on the two upper floors, and were reached by a door in the Rue du Jour, thus named in a spirit of contradiction, it would seem; for as the church of Saint-Eustache stood near by, casting a huge shadow over it, this street, called "Daylight Street," was really one of the darkest in all Paris.

Thanks to the two distinct entrances, Machefer could always come in and go out without being seen by his customers or even his

clerks. He stopped the coach and sent it away, and took his two companions in by the private entrance. His habits were very simple, and his only servant was an old peasant woman whom he had brought from his own province, and who was quite devoted to him.

He put the little humpback in her charge, and told her to give him some breakfast, and then he led Lucien up to the second floor, to a plain but neatly furnished room.

"You will be perfectly at home here," said he, seating him in a comfortable arm-chair of the so-called "Voltaire" style, "and even better than at home, for no one will come here to look for you, whereas in the Rue des Bons-Enfants——"

"Then my lodgings are really watched?" interrupted the young ex-officer.

"They were watched very closely immediately after your disappearance, but they are not watched so closely now. Still, it would not do to trust to that. You have been pointed out as suspicious."

"By whom?"

"I don't know. I thought at first that you had been denounced as a Freemason; but, as neither I nor any of our friends have been disturbed, I changed my opinion, and I imagine that if the police are looking for you, it must be on account of that individual whom you met one Sunday night at the café of the Rotunda, and who quarrelled with you—the man to whom you so imprudently gave your card. You told me that story some days afterwards, and I did not attach much importance to it at the time, but later on, when I thought of it, I came to the conclusion that that man was a hired bully."

"I think the same."

"And, having your name and address, he, no doubt, handed in a report accusing you of seditious talk, or perhaps of conspiring with other half-pay officers, and advised stern measures with regard to you."

"Yes; it must be so."

"Well, be it as it may, it is certain that you have the police after you, and we came to the conclusion, Vernède and I, that you had been arrested, and that the reason why we had no news of you was that you were in prison, in close confinement."

"No, indeed! my adventure was much stranger than you think."

"I guessed a part of it when I read your letter to Thérèse. I'll wager that you have been fighting a duel," said Machefer.

"Yes, with a Prussian officer."

"It is unnecessary to ask if he was killed. I know your skill, and when you fight the allies you do not miss your mark."

"I killed him, but I received twenty stabs with a knife, and was left for dead."

"What! with a knife?"

"Yes, and in a coach, too. The madman did not wish to fight in any other way; he declared that I had insulted him at cards."

"Ah! So you had been playing, in spite of your fine promises."

"I lost my head, you see. Monsieur Vernède told me that he was embarrassed. I knew that he required three hundred thousand francs."

"And you undertook to supply the money?"

"Did he tell you so?"

"Yes, and I will confess that I was greatly surprised, for I did not believe you to be rich enough to find that amount in a few days' time."

"Alas! I hadn't a third of it by me, and it was to procure the remainder that I went to try my luck at No. 154."

"And fortune deserted you just when you thought that you had succeeded? That's always the way! I am now beginning to understand your adventures, that is, with the exception of those which followed your duel in the coach. How is it that we found you in a house in the Ruc d'Enfer?"

"I was taken there when I became insensible."

"Who took you there?"

"A man whom I met at the Palais-Royal when the quarrel began, and who acted as my second."

"A Frenchman?"

"Yes, an old man. His name is Bonnin. He made a small fortune in business, and owns that house, but doesn't live there."

"And did he take care of you?"

"Yes, and his housekeeper attended to my wounds. He did not wish to call in a doctor for fear of bringing trouble upon himself. The death of the Prussian must have been talked about, and——"

"He was certainly a very prudent man," interrupted Machefer.

"But tell me, why did this charitable gentleman intercept your letters to Vernède, for we suppose from your letter to Thérèse that he did suppress them."

"You are right. I wrote three letters before penning the one that so miraculously reached Mademoiselle Vernède, and he burned all three."

"How charming! You were kept, it seems, like a State prisoner. And the person who asked for you was seized upon! Why that house must be a Bastille, and the man must have wished to keep you there for ever."

"You see that he didn't, as he let me go when I desired."

"Then I cannot understand it all, and you will do me a great favour by explaining this mystery."

"I do not clearly understand it myself, for I have not yet had time to think it over. I did not know till an hour ago that Monsieur Bonnin had suppressed my letters, and I fancied that I was perfectly free. However, I have reasons for thinking that he had a personal interest in keeping me with him whilst allowing me to suppose that I was free to go."

"What was this personal interest?"

"It is somewhat difficult to explain; but I will try to make you understand. You must know that this man Bonnin came up to me in the Palais-Royal to propose a very strange bargain to me."

"A bargain?"

"Yes, you know that I had an uncle."

"Colonel Lacaussade, who was killed at the battle of the Beresina?" asked Machefer.

"Exactly. Well, Bonnin asserts that my uncle has left me his entire fortune by a will which is now in the hands of a person known to him."

"And he offers to obtain that will for you?"

"Yes, on condition that I will give him——"

"A million?"

"How do you know that the sum he demands is a million?" asked Lucien, greatly surprised.

"I will tell you," replied Machefer, whose face displayed an undefinable emotion; "but, first of all, tell me what is the appearance of this Monsieur Bonnin?"

"He is of medium height, with so insignificant a face that it is hard to describe it. So far as I can tell, he must be between fifty and sixty."

"Hasn't he got grey eyes?"

"Yes, cat's eyes; only they never shine."

"Good! and what kind of a voice?"

"A hoarse voice, without any other special characteristic."

"That is the man, then!"

"Ah! do you know him?"

"I have perhaps seen him. But, first of all, tell me did he mention the name of the person who, according to his account, is in possession of your uncle's will?"

"He took good care not to do that. It is his secret—the secret that he proposes to sell me."

"Ah! I see. Well, did he offer to bring this person to you?"

"No; but he undertakes to procure the will from this person, and then to bring it to me."

"Immediately?"

"No, but in a very short time, when he returns from a journey which will last a fortnight, or a month at the most."

"I have no further doubt now!" exclaimed the provision dealer, who had become more and more excited.

"What do you mean? Pray, explain yourself. You are killing me with your mysterious ways."

"Lucien, my dear Lucien," exclaimed Machefer, "recall all that you can, and answer the question that I am about to ask of you. Do you know, or have you ever known, a woman who bears the strange name of Zenobia Capitaine?"

"Zenobia Capitaine?" repeated Lucien. "It does seem to me that that strange-sounding name isn't unfamiliar."

"Try to remember," said Machefer; "it is of the utmost importance."

"Wait a moment! I think that formerly, during my childhood, there was—yes—that is it—there was a good woman who used to tell me stories to send me to sleep, and who was called Mother Zenobia. She was the widow of a man named Capitaine, who had formerly served in the Gardes Françaises, and been my uncle's gamekeeper."

"Good! and what did she do?"

"I do not remember very clearly. She must have left the country when I was not more than eight or ten years old. Wait a moment! Ah! I remember now. She went away as a sutler-woman with the battery commanded by my uncle at Marengo, and afterwards she was with him during all his campaigns, and among others, the Russian one."

"Ah! I was sure of it!"

"I think too, that she was killed; for I remember now that last year one of my countrymen passing through Paris told me that no news had ever been had of her or of the colonel."

"That is it!" exclaimed Machefer. "Well, do you know, my boy, I think that luck has returned to us?"

"Will you be kind enough to explain your questions and exclamations?" said Lucien, who was completely puzzled.

"Yes, certainly, I will explain; but you must expect to be surprised and delighted. You disappeared one Sunday, did you not?"

"On the 9th of July. I had the happiness of passing the day with Monsieur Vernède and his daughter, and I have not seen them since, for I met the Prussian that night at the card-table."

"And you ruined yourself; you fought, and then you were taken to the Rue d'Enfer?"

"Yes, to Monsieur Bonnin's house, which I did not leave!"

"Well, then, on the following day, which was Monday, I went to spend an hour at the little café where I usually go after breakfast. When in Spain, I got used to taking a short nap in the afternoon."

"Isn't the café in the Rue des Bourdonnais?"

"Yes, at a few steps from our friend Vernède's house."

"I have been there once or twice," said Lucien.

"Yes, I remember. Then you must have noticed that the master of the house and the waiter shouted whenever they spoke to me, as though I were deaf."

"Yes."

"They think that I am deaf. I sometimes indulge in this joke, which is an excellent precaution at the same time. When a man conspires, it is as well not to neglect these little matters. On this famous Monday I was there, in my usual corner, and I had begun to doze over my newspaper. All at once, however, I saw a person come in, whom I had already seen several times, and whom I knew to be a detective—untidy linen, an uneasy look, and a sly face. The

fellow seated himself at a table near me, and asked for some beer and a couple of glasses. He expected some one. This already interested me, although I did not suspect anything. Then I shut my eyes again, but, as you may readily guess, I did not sleep at all."

"But what has this story to do with——" began Lucien.

"You are in the deuce of a hurry. Let me finish, if you want to find out. I was saying that I pretended to sleep. An hour later, the man whom the spy was waiting for arrived. He was dressed like an old trooper, and disguised to perfection. Any one else might have been deceived, and I can tell you that the fellow is extremely cunning. However, I am not a man to be taken in like that, and I found him out by the way in which he held his head when he was seated. He had one eye upon his comrade, and one upon those around him."

"Well, what did he do, this sham soldier?" asked Lucien, who was beginning to feel interested.

"He began by suggesting that he should take the other man away, so as to talk without being overheard; but the fool, who is in the habit of coming to the café, assured him that I was as deaf as a post, and he believed it. Then they began to talk aloud, and at times also in a low tone, but as I have sharp ears, I did not lose a word. They talked about spying. The sham trooper had been watching at the post-office, and had been watched himself in his turn, and followed by a man who, so he suspected, belonged to the high political police. There was a woman in the matter—a woman who had gone to ask for a letter under the name of Zenobia."

"That is strange, indeed! The name isn't common, and this may concern the sutler-woman."

"Not so fast! There was nothing more said just then as to this Zenobia, whose first name only was mentioned. But the old trooper also asked his companion if the police had heard of a duel between a Frenchman and a Prussian."

"He asked that on Monday, and I had only fought on Sunday night! No one but Monsieur Bonnin himself could have known of it. Can this detective, disguised as an old soldier, have been he?"

"You will see. His confederate told him that nothing of the kind had been heard of; that they had merely found a foreign soldier who had been murdered in a coach."

"Murdered? He lied!" exclaimed Lucien.

"Well, all this, as you may suppose, did not interest me much, and I merely listened as a matter of duty rather than with any real hope of hearing anything that might be useful to the masons. All at once, however, your name was uttered."

"My name?"

"Yes; the oldest asked the other one if he knew a half-pay lieutenant named Lucien Bellefond, who was being watched on account of politics; the other said no, but added that he would make

inquiries, and the rascals separated, promising to meet at the same place on the following Monday at noon."

"Did you return there?"

"You need not ask. I even made an earlier breakfast so as not to lose so good a chance."

"And what did you find out?"

"This time your name was not mentioned, and they said nothing more about the duel in the coach, but they said a great deal about this Zenobia, and I learned that her surname was Capitaine. I also know what the false soldier, whom I recognised, wants to get from her. On this second occasion he was dressed in a blue coat, nankeen pants, and he had shoes with silver buckles."

"It is the same man, then; it is Bonnin himself!" exclaimed Lucien, in no little surprise.

"Of course; but listen. I am now coming to the strangest part of the adventure. The man in the blue coat spoke out frankly to his confederate. He had already told him a couple of weeks before to try and find this Zenobia, but he had not, it seems, told him why he was looking for her. At this second meeting he told him the facts, no doubt to stimulate his zeal by promising him a portion of the booty. It seems that this Zenobia has possession of a will which leaves a large fortune, two millions at least——"

"Exactly the sum that Bonnin mentioned as bequeathed to me by my uncle's will."

"Which leaves it to an individual who is not the heir-at-law, and who is entirely ignorant of the existence of the will."

"My case exactly!"

"The man added that he had this heir in his power, and that he intended to obtain one-half of the fortune by means of a written agreement."

"Yes; one million."

"But he had not yet found Zenobia. He wished to find her at all costs, and he promised his confederate five per cent. on his million if he found her before the end of the month."

"I now understand why he did not urge me to sign sooner," said Lucien."

"The confederate promised to do his best, as you may suppose, and they parted."

"But you knew all?"

"I know nothing, on the contrary; and their conversation worried me very much, though I could not guess that it related to you. It is even a miracle that I remember the details, and you see that it is as well to have a good memory. Just now, when you spoke of the colonel's will, and Bonnin's proposition, the story of the other day returned to me, and the name of Zenobia Capitaine was a flash of light."

"Then you believe that this woman has my uncle's will in her possession?"

"It is as clear as day."

"But if she died in Russia, what then?"

"What do you know about that? It has been asserted that she is dead, that is true; but every day soldiers return who were made prisoners during the retreat. I firmly believe that this detective, who is speculating upon other people's money, did not waste his time in telling his confederate a mere falsehood; I believe that the sutler-woman has recently returned to France. What could be more natural than that your uncle should have confided his will to her? She had followed him through all his campaigns, as you yourself have just told me. She came from the same part of the country, and had been known to you from childhood. She was with him when he died."

"All that is possible, indeed," said Lucien, "but I wonder why she did not tell me of her return, and why this secret is known to Monsieur Bonnin; for I have no doubt now but what the detective whom you saw and the man in the Rue d'Enfer are one and the same person."

"I don't know or care how all that is," replied Machefer, "as you can now dispense with this man. We shall find Zenobia Capitaine without him. She will give you the will, and you will pocket the two millions without being obliged to part with one of them. Vernède will be saved, and his daughter will be happy."

"Yes," said Lucien, "all that I have will belong to Monsieur Vernède; but I shall only have but half of the inheritance, for I have signed a promise to give a million to this Bonnin."

"What! have you committed such an act of folly as that?"

"Alas! yes; I have signed the paper. It happened only an hour ago. It is really a fatality! I had just put my name to it when that stone fell at my feet—one minute too late."

"The devil take your haste! Couldn't you wait before delivering yourself up to this man, tied hand and foot?"

"What would you have? I believed that I was deserted by one and all. I had written in vain."

"Didn't it ever occur to you that this rascal had intercepted your correspondence? Love must have prevented you from reasoning."

"I believe it did."

"To lose a million for want of thought! That is hard!"

"True; but what is to be done?"

The purveyor at first said nothing. He was walking up and down the room, stamping and muttering to himself. "No; he shall not have that money—the rascal shall not have it!" he cried at last. "A paper of that kind is of no account—no court would approve of it. A man cannot sell his patrimony for a mess of pottage. That was all very well in Esau's time, but it won't do now. Why did not that occur to me at once? Come, my dear boy, do not be alarmed. The mistake that you have made is of no

consequence, for, if Bonnin has the impudence to claim this money, you can send him to the devil."

"You are mistaken," replied the lieutenant; "I shall be obliged to keep the contract, unfortunately."

"Why, since I tell you that——"

"Because I gave my word of honour not to dispute the validity of the paper."

"What in the name of sense did you do that for? You must be insane, utterly insane!"

"That may be; but it is done. I shall keep my word."

"Good! And what if I, who have not given my word, should go to that rascal's house, that den of his, and make him give me back the paper by threatening to thrash him?"

"I gave him my word that he should not be troubled by me or mine."

"You must have sworn to ruin yourself, it appears to me!"

"I did not know the situation," began Lucien. "If I had——"

Machefer raised his hands towards heaven, and resumed his furious promenade, muttering the most frightful oaths to himself. All at once, however, he stopped, for a fresh idea had occurred to him. "But what did you agree to do? Wasn't it to give the million in exchange for the delivery of the will?"

"Yes; such are the terms of the agreement that he made me sign."

"Then, if this Bonnin does not hand you the will you will owe him nothing?"

"Of course not."

"Well, then, we are saved; and the scoundrel will not be able to rob you of half your fortune."

"I have told you that I shall not break my word."

"You need not break it; be easy as to that; for the man cannot sell you a will that he has not got."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I know where the will is. The sutler-woman has it. That is as clear as anything can be. Now, she would rather give it to you than to an adventurer whom she does not know."

"I did not think of that," muttered Lucien.

"It is very simple. You can say to this Bonnin: 'I was quite willing to pay you the price agreed upon for the will. But you have not got it, whereas I have. So we are quits.'"

"I do not really know whether that would be fair."

"You must be joking. In the first place, no one need trouble himself about such a rascal as that. He would not have failed to steal all your uncle left, if he could have done so; and I don't see that even the most scrupulous conscience can find any fault with what I say. You swore to purchase the will—well and good; but the will has to be handed to you. There is a kind of race after an inheritance in all this. So much the worse for Bonnin if he is left in the lurch."

"The fact is that he would be well caught, and could not complain. But are you really sure that it is this Zenobia Capitaine who has my uncle's will?"

"Who the deuce can it be, if it isn't she? Have you forgotten what I told you about what I heard at the café. You may be sure that Bonnin would not disturb himself about the sutler-woman if she hadn't got your fortune in her hands."

"From what you tell me, he is not the only one who is looking for her, as another detective went to the post-office also."

"Don't let us mix up the matter; it is complicated enough as it is. Everything goes to show that the most fortunate chance in the world has put me upon the right track, and that all we now have to do is to find this Zenobia Capitaine."

"That may not be so easy as you fancy, as Bonnin has not yet found her. He must have looked everywhere for her; and if, as you think, he really is a detective, he must have facilities for action that you have not got."

"Bah! I will find other ways, and, besides, I have an advantage over him, which is that I am not afraid of anything; whereas, I'll venture to say that he is afraid of everything."

"It can be no small matter to find a woman whom one doesn't know in this vast city."

"Who said that we should find her in Paris? She isn't here, I am sure of it."

"What makes you think so?"

"If she were, she would have begun by making herself known, as she would only have come here to fulfil the mission given her by the colonel."

"Letters don't always reach their addresses. I know that; and I suppose that, like me, you believe in the existence of the dark room."

"Of course; and it may be that, as a conspirator, you have already been pointed out to those who unseal the letters; but let us go on to other proofs. What did Bonnin say when you left him? It is impossible that he let you go without asking where he should be able to find you, so as to hand you the will."

"Oh! yes; he inquired very anxiously about my plans, and I told him to write to me or call at Monsieur Vernède's house."

"You did wrong," said Machefer, at once. "You should not have given our friend's address to a spy."

"You forget that he already knew it," replied Lucien.

"From the letters which you confided to him, and which he intercepted? True, I had forgotten that. Well, I hope that no great harm is done. But, at all events, you will do as well to warn Vernède. Now, didn't Bonnin say that he was going away?"

"Yes; and he admitted that he was going to get the will, which was not yet in his possession."

"Good! and how long did he say that the journey would last?"

"From two to three weeks."

"That is it."

"What do you mean?"

"It takes four or five days to go to Périgueux, and as long to return. That makes ten. It will be enough for him to talk with the sutler-woman, and induce her to give him your uncle's last will and testament."

"Then you think that the woman is at Périgueux?"

"I am sure of it. Where can she be, as she is not in Paris? She must have gone to her own part of the country when she returned from Russia, for she must have relied upon obtaining some information about you there."

"She will certainly hear of me if she goes to the overseer at the Château Lévêque, not far from the city."

"Does he know your present address?"

"No; I have not written to him for a year past, and, when I did, I was not living in the Rue des Bons-Enfants."

"So you see that Zenobia may not know where you are, and that is probably the reason why she has not given any sign of life."

"It may be so."

"And, since you did not go after her, you run a great risk of not seeing her for a long time; or, what is still worse, of letting the old rascal in the Rue d'Enfer get ahead of you."

"Then you advise me to go to Périgueux?"

"You must be crazy!"

"But it seems to me what you say amounts to that?"

"I said that it seemed to me urgent to be beforehand with Bonnin as regards Zenobia Capitaine; but heaven forbid that I should advise you to undertake the journey yourself! To begin with, you are much too weak to travel, and, besides, it would be very imprudent. You have been denounced as an enemy of the government, that is evident, as your lodgings have been watched. A description of your person must have been sent to the police, and especially to head-quarters, in your own part of the country. So you would be arrested as soon as you left the coach."

"What shall I do, then?"

"You are really very much at a loss, are you not? Any one would think that there was not one to go to Périgueux in your stead."

"Yes; but in a matter of this kind it is not easy to find any one to act in one's own place."

"But you have some one to act in your place."

"Who can it be?"

"Why, it is I, you great goose!" said Machefer, laughing.

"What! will you go in my place?" exclaimed Lucien.

"Yes. Does that surprise you? It needn't. What is the use of having friends if they are not to be relied upon in such a case as this?"

"I recognise you in this, my dear friend, and I thank you with all my heart, but——"

"But what?"

"I do not know whether I ought to accept your generous offer."

"You do not trust me or my ability, it seems."

"No, it isn't that, of course, but I don't want you to give up your business on my account."

"Give up my business! What are you talking about? It would be a pity if my shop could not be left for a short time, and it is clear that you do not know what business is. Remember that there isn't a year during which I don't go off two or three times for a couple of weeks to buy oranges at Marseilles or cod at Granville. I have my cashier, old Frantz, who formerly served in the dragoons; and, when I am not there, he manages everybody just as he used to manage his platoon, and things go on all the better; for I am too good-natured and obliging with the clerks and customers. So don't worry yourself about my business. It won't suffer by my journey, and your interests will gain by it. Now, it is all settled, and I shall go."

"When?"

"To-night, of course," replied Machefer.

"To-night?"

"Yes, I think that it is best to take the bull by the horns, and, besides, I don't want to let Bonnin get ahead of me. He won't lose any time, you may be sure of that."

"The fact is, that if you believe in the utility of this journey, it is best not to put it off."

"I do believe in it—that is to say, I will bet a hundred louis to one that I shall find Zenobia before the end of the week, and bring you the will in a fortnight from now."

"You were speaking just now of the dangers to which I should be exposed in going there. Won't you be incurring the same dangers?"

"Not at all, my dear friend, not at all. I have been a mason, it is true, and I am still a mason, although our meetings are suspended for the time being, but I am not pointed out to the police; and as the spy whom we walled up is not here to denounce me——"

"You bring back a frightful remembrance," exclaimed Lucien.

"Bah! we only carried out our laws with regard to him, and he fully deserved to be walled up, I assure you. However, let us return to our affair. I need not fear being recognised, and, besides, I have a passport in perfect form, made out in the name of Timoleon Machefer, provision dealer. To defy all the commissaries and mounted police in France and Navarre, I need only have it looked at and viséd for Périgueux, which I shall do at once. I will then engage a seat at the Messageries Royales, and I shall return here to pack my trunk and bid you good-bye. Then off I go."

"You are prompt, I must say."

"I had to hurry much faster when I was with the army in Germany."

"But, admitting that you leave without any trouble, how will you discover this woman in a town where you are a stranger, for you have never been to Périgueux that I know of, and have no acquaintances there?"

"No, and I can do very well without that."

"Remember that I cannot give you the slightest information. I don't know where Madame Capitaine may have gone, and I cannot describe her to you, for I have not seen her for fifteen years past, and she must have greatly changed since the time she used to tell me stories. You may, however, perhaps find out something from the man who rents my farm."

"Don't be alarmed, my friend. I am an old fox and I know how to find chickens. I only ask you for one thing."

"What is that?"

"Something to make the sutler-woman recognise me as your friend."

"Oh! I will write a letter that you can take with you," replied Lucien, promptly.

"No. A letter from you might compromise me under certain circumstances. I might be arrested and searched. We must think of everything. As a general rule, my dear Lucien, it is best to write as little as possible. I should prefer some object which the police wouldn't notice, but which would be significant in Zenobia's eyes."

"I don't know what in the world to give you. You might say that my favourite story was 'Tom Thumb?'"

"That would not be sufficiently conclusive. Zenobia would not think that enough. Haven't you not got some ring—some family jewel—that is known to her?"

"No, I haven't. But wait a moment. It seems to me that when she was going to Marengo she gave me—yes, I remember now!" suddenly exclaimed Lucien, unbuttoning his vest, "she gave me this medal of Notre Dame de Fourvières."

And he hastily broke the silken cord by which a little oval medallion hung about his neck.

"Do you see this cross cut with the point of a knife upon it?" he asked. "She gave it to me, saying that the sign would bring me good luck. And the fact is," added the officer, lowering his voice, "that it has done so, for I have been on the battle-field scores of times since she gave it me, and I never had any wound but a very slight one in the leg——"

"And a dozen stabs with a knife in a coach," interrupted the purveyor, with a laugh. "But I'm not sneering. I have seen men in the army who always wore some such medal, and were glad that they did so. But you must make up your mind to part with this one for a time, for I cannot imagine a better passport to Zenobia's favour."

"Take it," said Lucien, eagerly, "and may it help you ! You really mean to go to-night, then ?" he added.

"Yes, my friend, and I can read a great many questions in your face which you don't like to ask. The first relates to the charming Thérèse, eh ?"

"I confess that it will be very painful to me if I don't see her during your absence."

"You shall see her, but not at her own house."

"What ! would she come here ? Would her father consent ?"

"Her father must now know a part of your adventures, as Mademoiselle Vernède went home after telling me all that she herself knew about them. However, I am now going to see my old friend Thomas, to tell him that I am going away and to explain your case to him—I do not say to plead your cause, for it is won already. Thérèse is a good lawyer, mind."

"Then you will beg of him not to desert me ?"

"I will tell him that it is absolutely necessary for you to remain here until my return, and that it would be too cruel to leave you alone here. And I am sure that Vernède will not need any urging to keep you company ; for, although he has some cause to complain, he has always been greatly attached to you. This man, who is as cold as marble outwardly, had tears in his eyes whenever he spoke of you. Ah ! you may be sure that he is fond of you."

"I am as much attached to him as he is to me, and I esteem him greatly," replied Lucien, with an embarrassed air. "Do you think that he would allow——"

"I know what you are going to ask," interrupted Machefer, laughingly. "You wish to know whether his daughter will come with him to see you ? Well, I will undertake to promise that she will."

"Oh, my friend, if you can bring that about, I——"

"I shall not even need to ask it ; I am sure that Vernède has already promised Thérèse to bring her here ; I am also sure that he will approve of my journey to Périgueux, and between ourselves, whether it prove successful or not, I am sure that Thomas does not desire any son-in-law but yourself."

"He will forgive me then, you think ?"

"What ! for having gambled ? When he knows that you did so to try and win the hundred thousand crowns for him, it would be very cruel on his part if he reproached you. And as for the Prussian whom you have killed, he will congratulate you as to that instead of blaming you. Now that you are comforted, let us say a few words more to the purpose. You must remain in this room, where you will be attended by an old servant, in whom you can place entire confidence. Frantz, my cashier, whom I will introduce to you presently, will see that you want for nothing. The little humpback will attend you, also, if he is discreet. I shall

place him under Frantz's supervision to-day. I now come to the visits that interest you the most. You may have noticed that this house has two entrances. Our friend Vernède is perfectly well acquainted with the one by which we came in. He can come with his charming daughter by the little entrance in the Rue du Jour, and get in without being noticed. But you must positively promise me not to go out till I return."

"Am I being searched for with so much vigilance, then?" asked the young ex-lieutenant.

"I don't know, but prudence is the parent of safety. You have a proper asylum here, and you don't need to expose yourself for the sake of taking the air in the street."

"I have no desire to do so."

"It seems to me that you will not die of weariness, thanks to our friends in the Rue des Bourdonnais. Now that I have said all, I must go. I have scarcely time to get it all accomplished. The coach will start at six, and it is past twelve already. I will see you again soon. I will now tell Jeannette to bring you up some breakfast."

"Thanks; I am not hungry," sighed the lover. And he added, pressing the hand which Machefer held out to him: "You will write to me when you are down there, won't you?"

"Yes," replied Machefer, "but under cover to Frantz, for your name is known, and I mistrust the postal service."

Then the provision dealer, taking up his hat, hastened away to secure a seat in the coach which would convey him where he hoped to find Zenobia Capitaine.

X.

"TO THE BARONESS DE SAINTE-GAUBURGE,
 "16 Rue de la Grange Batelière, Paris,

"PÉRIGUEUX, 5th August, 1815.

"My dear Zoé,—I promised to write to you when I started, and I now add to that weakness the still greater one of keeping my promise. I cannot refuse anything to women. The Duke of Otranto, our illustrious patron, has often reproached me on that account. But you are not like other women, for you are working for the same cause that I am; besides, you are personally interested in the success of the expedition which I have undertaken, as you will help me to spend the inheritance of my dear uncle whenever I succeed in getting it; and I confess that, although I am not naturally talkative, I long to tell you my adventures. They will amuse you, and besides, later on you can perhaps give me some information which will explain them.

"So, without further preamble, I will at once begin at the beginning. You know that on Tuesday evening, after a sweet kiss from you, I started off by the coach for Périgueux, provided with a passport in the name of Jean Gardilan, horse-dealer, and with a letter of recommendation from Fouché to the civil and military authorities. We were full, but I had the best seat in the right corner. The other corner was occupied by a respectable old man, with a nice-looking suit, and gold spectacles. In the middle there was a stout man of forty, as round as an apple and as gay as a lark.

"I took a good look at both of them without seeming to do so. I have to keep my eyes from growing dull, you know. The stout man, who was red and puffy, could only be a travelling agent or a tradesman, I thought, and he took the trouble, indeed, to tell me all about himself before we had passed the Barrière. He said that he sold truffles, and was going to Périgueux to treat with the peasantry for a large quantity of these interesting tubercules, to be delivered to him next December. And it is really a shame that this is not the truffle season, for you would like some, my fair friend, I have no doubt of it; and if this had been the right time I could have brought you some.

"I saw at once that my neighbour was telling the truth, and I felt the more sure of him from the fact that he was as deaf as a post. He talked a great deal, but heard very little. As for the respectable old man in the left corner, that was not altogether the same thing.

He vainly assumed a simple look. I mistrusted his nose. It was a big nose, round at the end, and although it looked innocent enough at first sight, it seemed to me as if it grew small or large at will like an india-rubber nose. I imagined that I had seen it once before, when it had an aquiline shape. Where? I could not remember. I said to myself, however, that I would study it the next day, and I then went to sleep. I need not add that I saw you in my dreams.

"The next day at breakfast, at Orleans, I made use of my amiability to get my two companions to talk, and I venture to say that I was to a certain degree successful. The truffle-seller, especially, seemed to take to me, although his infirmity obliged him to laugh very often without knowing what for ; however, between the dessert and the coffee he swore an eternal friendship for me. The old man with the spectacles was more reserved. But he made no difficulty about informing those present that he was going to Périgueux on account of a lawsuit, and that he had retired from business, and lived in the Marais district of Paris.

"While he was talking on, I kept on examining him, and the more I did so the more plainly did I realise that his face was made up. He had made his forehead look lower by donning an ugly red wig, and he had gold spectacles with glasses an inch thick. I said to myself that if I could only see his eyes without those glasses I should know him at once. It ran in my head to such a degree that I made up my mind to resort to extreme measures to bring it about.

"All at once the conductor called out : 'Get in, gentlemen !' We then left the table in haste, jostling one another, and on passing out at the door I found myself beside the worthy old man. By catching my own eye-glass in his ribbon as I twirled it round—a trick that I learned in London—I removed his glasses and sent them three yards off. The old man darted after them, and hastily picked them up. This was a first proof. A near-sighted man would not have known where they had fallen. But before he had put them on again I knew everything. His eyes met mine, and that was all I needed to recognise him.

"Guess who it was ! I will allow you a hundred or even a thousand guesses, or rather I will tell you at once, to save you the trouble of guessing. It was the same old rascal who undertook to follow me three weeks ago, and who then wore the disguise of an old trooper. He followed me from the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau to the Palais-Royal. I told you about it. You know it was on the very day when I went with Zulma, your former maid, to the post-office. Don't be jealous, as it was all on account of the inheritance. Yes, my dear Zoé, that old rascal, that monkey in spectacles, that sham soldier who escaped me at the Tuileries, were all one and the same. I never more bitterly regretted that he had not been killed under the balcony of the palace.

"The serious part of this encounter need not be explained to so

able a woman as yourself, my dear baroness. This rascal who had ventured to mount guard at the post-office at the same time as myself, and who went off to Périgueux twenty days later, was evidently looking for Zenobia Capitaine, the woman mentioned to me by my uncle's agent. You will tell me, my adored Zoé, that this is all mere imagination. But I am far too keen to believe that, and I shall soon have proof of it.

"I hasten to reassure you on one point. Although he saw me closely on the morning when I followed him, after he had followed me, he did not recognise me—of that I am sure. It is true that I had surpassed myself this time in making up my face. My hair was as black as jet, and as short as that of the 'Corsican ogre,' while my black moustache was cut like a scrubbing-brush. My complexion was dark also, and I looked like a young guardsman. If Ney or Labédoyère saw me, they would shake hands with me at once. With regard to Labédoyère, there is a rumour here that he has already been arrested in Paris. I should not be sorry if this were the fact, as it would greatly simplify my political work, and I should have more time for the matter of my inheritance, which interests me a great deal more than the affairs of His Majesty Louis XVIII. However, do not say so to Fouché.

"To return to that scamp, while wondering how it was that he was upon my path again, I thought of playing him a good trick ; and I really fancied that I had got rid of him yesterday morning. We had passed Limoges, and were going up a never-ending hill. All the passengers had alighted, and the spectacled serpent was some way behind. At the top of the hill, when we were going to get in again, I told my friend the truffle-seller and the conductor that the third occupant had gone ahead, and that we should find him on the other side of the hill. We drove on, and of course we did not catch him up, as he had remained in the rear. Meanwhile, I laughed in my sleeve, and I said to myself : 'When I reach Périgueux, old boy, you will still be in the suburbs of Limoges.' And this seemed all the more certain, as the conductor remarked when we reached the next stage that it was all the worse for the fool, and that he could not wait. But alas ! he caught us up at a place called La Coquille. He had succeeded in hiring a peasant's cart with two little horses that went like the wind. He is a determined fellow. Do you not agree with me, baroness ?

"Well, I was so surprised that I did not worry him again during the journey. I spent my time in talking to the truffle-seller, who is a guileless being, and I changed my batteries. It is evident that the man with the spectacles is more dangerous than I had thought. I cannot help believing that he belongs to the 'house,' although I do not remember ever having seen him there. Still, he looks like a detective. I wondered whether his excellency on the Quai Malaquais could have sent him after me while I attend to my mission. The dear duke does such things at times.

"But I shall soon know for certain, for I am going to the prefect to-morrow to show my papers and ask for his help and protection, and I shall tell him that there was a suspicious-looking man in the coach with me. I shall be very unlucky if I do not succeed in having the fool arrested and put in prison, or sent back to Paris as an agent of the usurper.

"We all alighted—he, I, and the truffle-dealer—and went to Plumejault's hotel, where we dined side by side. I do not wish to lose sight of the fellow till I send him to a safe place. He is full of confidence, I believe, and willingly honours the dealer with his conversation; and the latter, who is a very good fellow, although simple, answers him half the time without knowing what he is saying.

"I don't think that this part of the country will please me much, being so far from you, although I was born here, and played here in my boyhood. But I do not care for all that now. Besides, the town is not a handsome one, by any means. However, what cookery, my dear baroness, what cookery! one ought to eat it on one's knees. We have no truffles, it is true, for they do not come in for three months yet, but just now we had a dish of mushrooms, and I sent for some Bergerac wine. It was splendid! I must send you some, it is so good.

"In the meantime, my fair Zoé, I kneel at your divine feet and offer you the heart of a horse-dealer, such as I now appear to the others, and I long for nothing save to be able to bring you the Golden Fleece. It is in the pocket of a sutler-woman, whom I shall tame, I trust. Jason, you know, tamed the dragon which guarded the Hesperides. When once I have got the will from her and have burnt it, matters will go on swimmingly, for she must have brought the certificate of my uncle's death; and I need then only take possession of the property.

"Two millions, baroness! do you feel all the force of those words, and can you count how many dainty suppers at the Rocher de Cancale such a sum would pay for? It seems to me as though I were already there. I will write soon again. For the present, I send you a kiss, and remain, your devoted

"MAXIME TRIMOULAC."

"MADAME JULIE BOUTARD,
"93 Rue d'Enfer, Paris."

"PÉRIGUEUX, 5th August, 1815.

"My dear Julie,—The devil take the stupid girl who dared to throw stones into my garden the other day! But for her our heir would still be under your care, and I should at least be easy as to that; but now I see trouble everywhere. This beginning will show you that my journey has not been uneventful, although I have arrived here safe and sound. I hasten to add that there is nothing lost, nor

even endangered. But perhaps some one has divined my purpose. I fear that I started a day too late.

"This is what has happened : I had, as you know, engaged a seat. We were full. I had two other passengers with me in the coupé, and I naturally looked at them. Would you believe that I at once recognised a face—that of a man whom I have seen twice already at the little café where I sometimes go in the Rue de Bourdonnais ! I should have preferred it if he had not been with me ; but he is so deaf and stupid that it does not matter. He is the less to be feared from the fact that I was disguised when I went to the café to meet Cornillon, and he cannot recognise me now, with my lawyer-like look, my white tie, and gold spectacles. However, matters became more complicated, as you will soon see.

"My other companion was a tall, long-legged fellow, with waxed moustaches, and a far from pleasant face. He was as dark as an Italian, and had bad, treacherous eyes. Scarcely was I seated than I pretended to doze off in my corner so as to watch him at my ease, and every time that I looked over my neighbour's head to do so, I met his wicked eyes fixed upon me. He was watching me, the rascal ! That was evident. But why ? I couldn't guess.

"On the morrow, at Orleans, we were coming from the breakfast table when the man contrived to pass me, and at the same time he made my spectacles fall off without seemingly intending to do so. He made me a number of apologies ; but I understood the trick, and I vowed that I would find out who the fellow was. It seemed to me that I had met him somewhere before, but I could not remember where it was that I had seen his hypocritical countenance. At last, in the afternoon, the heat being intense, he went to sleep in his corner. The sun shone full upon him, and then what did I see ? A mole in the very middle of the right cheek, with some hairs upon it—hairs that were almost red. This was a flash of light, as it were, and I examined the fellow's complexion, which I now saw clearly. He was fair, with thousands of little freckles, and when he opened his eyes I saw that they were of a greenish grey. With this, however, he had hair, eyebrows, and moustache as black as a raven's wing. He could not take me in, I assure you !

"I now felt sure that the scamp had made up his face. I had something to go upon. It was necessary for me to reconstruct him in my mind's eye as he really was ; and, although I had seen him before, this was no easy matter, but I succeeded at last. I do not think, my dear Julie, that I have grown very rusty since the time when, in the year IX. of the Republic, I had the good fortune to discover your acquaintance with the makers of the infernal machine, and the still greater good luck to get you out of that scrape.

"I can hear you ask, 'Who is this man ?' Well, do you remember that on Tuesday, before I went to the Messageries, when I first told you about the will that is to give me a dowry for Clarisse, I spoke of an unknown man, whom I had met in the court-yard at

the post-office accompanied by a woman, who asked for the letters addressed to Zenobia Capitaine? You have not forgotten that this man, whom I followed at first, followed me in his turn, and almost caused me to be killed in the garden of the Tuileries? Well, it is with the same fellow that I have been travelling from Paris to Périgueux!

"This is impossible, you will say. Well, it is true. I recognised him by his way of dragging his feet along, a habit which he has contracted in trying to make himself look shorter, when he is too tall for his disguise. I have not a shadow of doubt now but what this is the very man whom I met in the Rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau.

"The meeting is strange, you will admit it. Cornillon told me that the rascal belonged to the high political police, and was greatly favoured by Fouché. But he could not give me any exact information about him, although I am sure that he knows him. Of course, the journey of a political agent to the South of France would be easy to account for at this juncture; and, indeed, there is nothing to show that he is going to the Dordogne for the sole purpose of meddling with my affairs. Why, however, should he have endeavoured to appropriate the sutler's letters? that is what I cannot understand. It is true that there is a way of accounting for both of these things. If, for instance, Fouché, who cannot be well disposed towards me, has had me watched because I know some State secrets, what then? Since I sent in my resignation I must be an object of suspicion to those who know that I once had the management of the dark room. Thus, it may be that Fouché has sent some one from the 'house' to watch me, without the slightest reference to Lacaussade's money. Still, even that does not explain how they know Zenobia Capitaine's name.

"Then again, did this good-for-nothing spy recognise me, when he first saw me in the coach, as the man whom he had followed from the Palais-Royal to the Tuileries? No, certainly not. And did he recognise me when he had knocked my spectacles off? I think not. It requires keener eyes than these men have now-a-days to find out an old hand like myself, and he cannot have suspected anything. No, he did not know my eyes again, although he knocked off my spectacles; he did not recognise them as those of the old grey-headed trooper whom he had seen at the post-office. Ah! I do not make such mistakes as to wear a wig that does not suit my complexion and eyebrows.

"It is certain that after his attempts at spying at the outset of the journey he kept quiet, and was even very attentive to me. I gave myself out as living in the Marais, upon a little money of my own, and said that I was going to Périgueux on account of a lawsuit. I call myself Bonnin, as in my passport. He swallowed all this very easily. He told me that he was going south to procure horses for the king's guards; and this is not a very cunning invention of his by any means. He also seemed disposed to be polite to me. When

we were near Limoges I was stupid enough to get left behind on one side of a hill, and the coach started off without me. Fortunately, I had the good luck to meet a peasant with a cart. The conductor thought that I was ahead. Monsieur Gardilan, as the spy calls himself, reproached him with his negligence, it seems, and congratulated me upon not being left behind on the road for good. Was he sincere? I cannot tell; at all events, I intend to keep an eye on him in the town where we arrived this morning. We are staying at the same hotel, and I shall be able to see all that he does.

"One person of whom I am absolutely sure is the gentleman from the café. This worthy old dunce deals in truffles, and seems to know this part of the country well. He is talkative, boastful, and indiscreet, and besides, as I have already said, he is very deaf. He is an excellent recruit, and I expect to get more than one useful point from him.

"Now, my dear Julie, I have only to begin work, that is, to start off to find Zenobia; prudently, of course, for there may be danger. I know where to obtain the first information, but to begin with I think it best to make sure that Gardilan has not come here to annoy me. In an affair like this it will not do to leave anything to chance.

"I believe that eight days will suffice to accomplish what I wish to effect, and I need not say that I shall start for Paris as soon as I have the will in my possession. I will let you know everything that may occur until that happy moment, for I have full faith in you, my dear Julie, whatever you may think. The proof of it is that I have left Clarisse under your care.

"As regards the dear child, I can but repeat what I said on the day when I went away. Calm her by allowing her to believe that the young officer will return when I do, and that we have only absented ourselves for the purpose of arranging the marriage that she hopes for.

"As regards outside matters, you know what you have to do; our heir promised me that I should not be disturbed by him, and he will keep his word. But if by any chance any one comes to ask any questions, I have told Bourdache to admit nobody. Watch him to see that he obeys. In case—but that is unlikely—any of the authorities should make inquiries, say that I am on a journey, and that you do not know my business. Moreover, I don't think that anything of that kind will happen. The young man is as much interested as I am in keeping his adventures quiet.

"Before closing this letter, I have only to renew to you all the assurances which I have so often given you, and I promise you that you shall have an income of six thousand francs a-year out of the colonel's money. You must therefore pray for my success.—Yours for life,

"LUC BONNIN.

"P.S.—Above all, not a word to Clarisse."

“MONSIEUR GUILLAUME FRANTZ,
“Cashier at M. Machefer's,
“9 Rue Montmartre, Paris.

“PÉRIGUEUX, 5th August, 1815.

“My dear Lucien,—Frantz, my cashier, will give you this letter, which I do not address to you direct, because I do not trust the postal service.

“I write you this almost on arriving, as I only reached your native city this morning, after a wearying journey and various unexpected incidents. I hasten to add that so far all has gone on well, and that chance seems to favour us.

“You know that I was late in getting my seat, and had to take one in the middle of the coupé. I reached the office at the appointed hour. The travellers were called. Number 1 was Monsieur Gardilan, and Number 2 Monsieur Bonnin. This was my first surprise. You may easily imagine that I took a good look at the so-called Bonnin. I remembered what you told me. It was exact. He was indeed the sham soldier. I recognised him at once, although he now had a white tie and blue spectacles.

“It is idle to say that I was not surprised to find your competitor, or rather your enemy. But I am satisfied with myself, for I did not flinch, and he did not imagine that I had detected the false trooper under the new disguise. He recognised me at once, although he did not appear to do so. Ah! he is a cool hand!

“I knew that his eyes would be on me, and I acted accordingly. I said who I was, and talked about my business, and stated that I was going to Périgueux for some truffles; and, moreover, I did not forget to appear to be deaf. If I had seemed to hear without having everything repeated to me, he would have mistrusted me. But I was no such fool. He thought me deaf at the café, and he thinks me so now. We were the best of friends by the time we reached the third stage.

“This did not prevent me from feeling anxious at his being in the coach. I said to myself: ‘We are going to Périgueux after the same game.’ But I am not sorry after all. I can watch Bonnin closely, and I have the advantage over him, for he does not dream that I know what he has come here for.

“You are delighted, no doubt, but wait a bit, all is not yet over. In fact, this is only the beginning. The other traveller, number one, who is called Gardilan, is a tall, long-legged fellow, of good appearance, well shaved and dressed. At first sight I did not feel any great liking for him, but I did not suspect him. But I suddenly saw that he was looking closely, and, indeed, with a very strange expression, at the other man. I know that way of looking. Fouché's detectives resort to it. So this made me reflect. Ten minutes later I saw that Bonnin was looking over the tops of his glasses at Gardilan. Being between them I could see it all, and before

night time, I was sure that my two men were watching each other closely.

"I cannot tell you how many tricks they played one another on the way. The younger one did the most of this. Bonnin limited himself to asking Gardilan close questions, while the latter did all he could to be disagreeable to your friend of the Rue d'Enfer. Among other things, he made the conductor believe that the old man had gone ahead when he had really lagged behind. He evidently hoped that he would be left on the way; and this came near being the case, for the coach would not have returned or waited for him. I must admit that I was glad to be delivered from Bonnin, for a time at least, for he is evidently a dangerous foe. But he is also naturally persevering, and found a cart somewhere, which enabled him to overtake us at the second stage.

"You see, my dear friend, that I had plenty of company, and was not at all dull. I had enough to do to study my companions. As for your host from the Rue d'Enfer, we know what he is going to Périgueux for, and I am glad that I met him, for it proves that I acted rightly. Bonnin, like myself, is going after your uncle's will, there can be no doubt of that. I guessed rightly, then, in saying that your sutler-woman had it with her.

"Thus, as regards Bonnin I am sure, but I am not sure as to the other man. He worries me. He says that he is travelling to find horses for the king's guards. That is not a regular business, and then, why does he watch the other man? I cannot suppose, however, that he also is after the colonel's will. Still, why has he come to Périgueux? I saw that he wished to question me by making me talk about the land of truffles and its inhabitants. I also found out that he only did so when we were alone. It is true that Bonnin asked the same questions, and always when the other was not beside us.

"If they could only thwart one another it would simplify my task. I have endeavoured to get into their good graces and to remain so. I play the deaf man very carefully, and make them shout themselves hoarse when they talk to me, which greatly amuses me. But I also pretend to be stupid, and, indeed, I have succeeded in making them believe that I am the most ignorant provision dealer in all France and Navarre. The result of their high opinion of my intellect is that they don't mistrust me, and thus I don't despair of becoming their confidant after a little time, which would be a great advantage to us.

"I say after a little while, because it seems to me that my two new acquaintances mean to remain here for some time. Bonnin states that he has a lawsuit to attend to, and will not leave until it is decided. Gardilan says that there are horses in Périgord that are exactly what he needs for mounting the king's men, and that his purchases will keep him here for two weeks at the least. He also likes the cookery of the place, and shows that he likes it, and I

think that he is very fond of good living. I must try to make him drink as well, and then set him talking. Meantime, I have told them both that I shall be here for some time myself.

"This, my dear Lucien, is how matters now stand. I am staying at the best hotel here, and so are they, and I shall soon find out what the hotel-keeper knows about Zenobia, for he knows everybody for ten miles around. The town is, moreover, full of gay people, who come to this house to feast, and they drink too much to be very careful as to what they say. In twenty-four hours, no doubt, I shall know what I want to know.

"We can be sure now that Bonnin will be working under my very eyes, for I shall contrive to watch him closely. This is an important point, as I know that I shall be as well able as he is to find the sutler-woman, and that she will not hesitate to choose between us if we both happen to court her at once.

"I need not tell you that I shall write frequently and let you know all that occurs. I am satisfied with my beginning. The enemy has arrived at the same time as myself, but I am better armed than he is, and will get the will.

"Bonnin can only show Zenobia his rascally face and his money, whereas I have the medal that you gave me with the cross upon it, made by her own hand. She will recognise it and listen to Timoleon Machefer, whose face, I flatter myself, is a thoroughly honest one, and will inspire her with confidence at once. But don't let me put the cart before the horse. To please the sutler-woman I must find her, and that is why I do not write anything further now. I am going into the kitchen to chat with the landlord, who, I think, is very talkative.

"I presume that you are not dull, for our friends must have called upon you often. Remember me to Thomas, and tell him to be careful. He will know what I mean. I send my respectful compliments to his charming daughter, and I need not ask you to watch over the poor little humpback who did us such good service. Frantz has orders to take care of him, but he is somewhat rough, and I want the boy to be well treated.

"I embrace you with all my heart, my dear friend, and hope to see you again before very long.—Your old comrade,

"TIMOLEON MACHEFER."

XI.

"TO THE BARONESS DE SAINTE-GAUBERGE,
 "16 Rue de la Grange Batelière, Paris.

"PÉRIGUEUX, 9th August, 1815.

"Dear Zoé,—I told you in my first letter that I was going to begin work at once. I have begun, but I have not yet accomplished anything; in fact, I have burnt my fingers.

"I must tell you how, for it is really amusing. On the day after I arrived, after a good breakfast, washed down with two bottles of Bergerac, which I drank to your good health, I went to the prefect, to whom I sent in my card with the Duke of Otranto's recommendation. I was made to wait a full hour, and I thought this rather disrespectful to our illustrious patron, but I was finally introduced into the room of the head authority in the great place for truffles.

"He received me coldly. He is a noble, 'a voltigeur of Louis XIV.', as such men are called by the Liberals, and seemed to feel a sovereign contempt for Fouché, under pretence that he had been a monk and was a regicide. What an idea! People may well say that these *émigrés* never learn and never forget anything.

"He began by asking me in a dry tone if I had not been in Périgord in 1811. Our patron, unfortunately, put that in his letter; I foolishly replied that I had, and that I had helped to bring some men who had robbed the State to the scaffold. This was fatal. It seems that among these guerillas there was a near relative of the prefect himself. I ought to have remembered that the government had changed twice since then.

"You may well suppose that what I said was highly displeasing to the prefect, who was already ill-disposed towards the 'house.' These old-fashioned royalists are all full of prejudice, and one should not rely upon them to favour a fusion of classes. He drily remarked that Colonel Labédoyère had already been arrested in Paris, that Marshal Ney had been captured in Auvergne, and that he had been informed of this; so that, as my mission had no longer any object, there was need of his interference.

"This was a formal dismissal, and it was accompanied by a look that showed me to the door. Anybody but Maxime Trimoulac would have gone, but I am a good war-horse. I respectfully observed to the prefect that my mission was more extensive than he thought, and that I had been sent to the south by his excellency the minister of the police of the realm, to study the general spirit of the public and

to watch certain persons ; that I counted upon passing a certain time in the Dordogne, and hoped to obtain all indispensable facilities from the authorities. The prefect, still as stiff as a ramrod, requested me to say exactly what I meant.

"I then did so. As the colonel and the marshal were arrested, I had no excuse, as regards Fouché, for prolonging my stay. This is as much as to say that my official mission was at an end, and that I might as well take advantage at once of a recommendation that I may never obtain again.

"Well, I declared to the head functionary that I was sent to watch and interrogate a certain Zenobia Capitaine, formerly a sutler-woman in the 19th Artillery, who had recently returned from Russia, and was suspected of being an emissary of the Bonapartist conspirators now located in foreign parts. This I made up on the spot, you see.

"The chance strokes are those that tell. Would you believe it, my beauty, on hearing this the prefect assumed a most serious air, looked at a register upon his desk, and solemnly replied : 'My administration has gone ahead of the government. The woman named Zenobia Capitaine was arrested last July, on the 14th, as suspected of being a Bonapartist engaged in propaganda on the usurper's account, and for having used seditious expressions. She is now in the city prison.'

"I had spoken at random, but I had spoken well. This imprisonment of the sutler-woman suited me exactly. I had her at hand without being obliged to run after her. You may imagine that I seized upon the chance. After a delicate compliment as to the vigilance of his administration, I said to the prefect that I requested permission to enter the prison freely, and speak to the prisoner without witnesses. He replied that he would give orders to that effect.

"I then thought of killing two birds with one stone and getting rid of the spectacled party who has been at my heels all the way from Paris. I spoke of him as a dangerous person, who was a revolutionary agent, recognised by me in spite of his disguise, and that he ought to be sent from one police station to another till he again reached Paris, where he would be obliged to face his record. The prefect made a memorandum of this, and told me that he would send the commissary of police to examine this traveller's papers.

"I said to myself that the rascal was now attended to, that he would get frightened, and that they would arrest him and send him back to where he came from. I bowed to the very ground, and returned to the hotel, enchanted with my morning's work. You are delighted too, I'll wager. But wait a little, and see how bad luck stepped in.

"The dinner hour came. We sat down. I sat, of course, between the truffle-seller and the spectacled serpent. Everybody was lively. The deaf man made such mistakes every moment that we

shrieked with laughter. We were eating some crawfish à la Bordelaise, such as you cannot get either at the Rocher or at Véry's, when suddenly the commissary appeared, with his scarf about him, and followed by two gendarmes. There was general astonishment. He asked to see our passports. Every one showed his own; I first, and then the truffle-seller. Both were correct, of course. Then came the white tie, who piteously replied: 'I have none, sir.' 'Then follow me, sir,' said the commissary. Whereupon the white tie left his crawfish, and without a word went off with the gendarmes, who took him away.

"I hear you say, 'That fellow is no credit to "the house." What stupidity!' I thought so, too, but wait a moment. You may imagine the stir occasioned by this arrest. The worthy truffle-seller could not get over it. Nor I, but not for the same reason. I could not understand how it was that an old hand like this man could have neglected the common precaution of a passport.

"Wait a bit, though, and you will see! The next day I rose as lively as a lark, feeling delighted at having got rid of the old spy, and I drank a bottle of white wine to open my appetite. I had not finished it, and was drinking with the trader, for he is really a good fellow, when I received my permit to enter the prison. I did not lose a moment, of course, but set off for the Cours Tourny, where the entrance of the jail is; and the head-keeper, who had been apprised of my coming, received me very politely and said: 'The sutler-woman is walking about the courtyard. You can question her at your ease. I will take you there.' He did so, and what did I see? A dozen male and female prisoners walking about in a great courtyard, and upon the bench there sat the spectacled serpent talking to a woman whom I at once set down as being Zenobia Capitaine herself.

"It was she, indeed, and I then understood why the rascal had no passport. He has come here, like me, after the sutler-woman; that is clear. He had found out by talking with the hotel-keeper that she was in prison, and had purposely got himself sent there. This was well managed, or else I am mistaken. But who would have supposed that the country prisons were so badly arranged that the two sexes are allowed to meet in this way? It is frightful, and I shall let his excellency know about it.

"It is needless to say that I complained to the keeper. He replied that there was so very little room. What an excuse! They should have kept Zenobia Capitaine in a dungeon, and have thrown the spectacled serpent into an underground hole.

"The old rascal did not look at all abashed at sight of me, but came up to me to say that he had written to Paris, and that he should soon be identified and set free. I wished him good luck, and sent for the sutler-woman to the clerk's office.

"You may think that she was easier to fool than the man with the white tie; but you are mistaken. I have unfortunately found

the most cunning sutler-woman in the whole French army. I presented myself at once as being sent by Lieutenant Bellefond, the colonel's heir, and made up a story to account for coming in his place. But it did not succeed. Zenobia did not contradict me, but she solemnly swore that the colonel was drowned in the Beresina, and did not confide any will whatever to her.

"I have been to see her every day for four days, and spent an hour each day with her, but we are no further advanced than we were before. I have laid traps for her in vain, she never varies in her replies. I almost believe that she is telling the truth, and, of course, if there is no will, I inherit by law.

"I do not, however, abandon the hope of making her speak out, and I have written to my uncle's man of business for fresh particulars.

"As soon as I arrive at any result, which will be soon, no doubt, I shall return to your cosy nest in the Rue de la Grange-Batelière. Till then, most charming of baronesses, I sign myself, as ever, your most ardent worshipper,

"MAXIME TRIMOULAC."

"MADAME JULIE BOUTARD,
"93 Rue d'Enfer, Paris.

"PÉRIGUEUX, 17th August, 1815.

"My dear Julie,—I shall greatly surprise you by stating that I have just left the city prison, after being kept there for ten days. That is why I did not write before. Do not be alarmed, however, at hearing that I have been locked up; I need not have gone to prison at all, as I shall presently explain. But, unfortunately, I have more serious news, and no very good tidings of the great affair.

"I was in the company of the truffle-seller and the spy whom I met at the post-office when I last wrote. I told you that I was on my guard with reference to one, and trying to get some information from the other. I did not learn much from the truffle-dealer, however, but the hotel-keeper told me that the sutler-woman who had been with Colonel Lacaussade to Russia had returned in June, and that a report existed that she had the colonel's will with her. He also told me something still more surprising, which was that Zenobia Capitaine had been accused of being a Bonapartist agent by the ultra-royalists here, and had been sent to prison, where she still was.

"This bad news disconcerted me, for it upset all my plans. I could not talk with Zenobia, and had no hope of being allowed to visit her cell. Fortunately, it occurred to me to join her by causing my own arrest. I had made inquiries and learned that the rules of the place were not at all strict, and that the prisoners could communicate with one another. This suited me, and I soon saw that my imprisonment would enable me to talk with the sutler-

woman at my ease. I had only to pretend to be of the same politics, and I could then pass as Lieutenant Bellefond's envoy.

"It now remained for me to find some pretext for being arrested. But although people often go to prison against their will, it is not so easy to go there when you wish to do so. I was in this dilemma when in the middle of our dinner the commissary of police appeared and asked for the passports of the travellers who had arrived the day before. I had an inspiration on the spot. I replied to him that I had none. I was afraid that the commissary might be a good fellow, who would ask me to identify myself otherwise, but he told me at once to go off with the gendarmes. I believe that my dear travelling companion, the man with the bristly moustache, had denounced me. Good spy! Little did he think how well he was playing my game!

"To tell the truth, I did not worry myself in the least, and my imprisonment was not a serious danger. I knew very well that, as I had a regular passport in my trunk, it would be found at last, if looked for, and I intended to say, when asked why I had hidden it, that I had merely wished to see how far the contempt of the authorities for public liberty would go. I had a variety of plans arranged in my own mind which were suited to the part that I intended to play while on my trip to prison. The inquiries about me would last several days. That suited me exactly, and all I wanted was to be able to talk to the sutler-woman.

"Things did not turn out altogether as I wished, however. At first all went well. I was treated politely. The gendarmes saw that I was not a malefactor, and the keeper, when he saw that I had a well-filled purse, became very deferential. He lodged me comfortably, and allowed me to walk about the court. I became acquainted with Zenobia at once, and, as you may imagine, I made every effort to treat with her.

"She is very like what I thought she would be. She is tall, and strong, and ruddy, and did not seem hard to deal with. I went straight to the point, and said that I had come from her friend Lucien Bellefond, who had received her letter, but could not come himself or reply, as he was being greatly annoyed on account of politics. This was at least plausible, especially after my arrest, and Zenobia listened to me attentively, but only made evasive answers, and I saw at once that she was on her guard.

"As to the letter addressed to the lieutenant, she avoided explaining herself, letting me tell its contents, and neither saying that she had written it nor that it did not exist. She spoke as guardedly of the colonel, declaring that he was dead, and that some day his death would be fully proved. She spoke more openly as to her dear Lucien, whom she greatly pitied for being persecuted by the government. But nothing more.

"You may imagine that I said all I could to win her confidence. She asked if the poor boy had changed much since she had seen

him, which was a skilful way of finding out whether I really knew him. I had no difficulty in describing him, and I did so. I spoke of his hasty temper, and she must have realised from that remark that I really knew the dear lieutenant.

"The first day was spent in this fencing, and the second, on which my talk was more skilfully managed, seemed to promise well. I was seated on a bench beside Zenobia, and I endeavoured to entrap her by insidious questions suddenly asked from time to time. I asked her, for instance, when she least expected it, why she had suddenly changed her mind after announcing her arrival to Lucien. I think that she was then about to make some admission, but just then, what should I see but the rascal with the mole on his cheek coming in with the keeper, who seemed to be obeying his orders.

"This fellow must belong to the police, you see, and must have a high position, too, to be admitted into prisons in this way. He came up to me, the vile rascal, and hypocritically condoled with me, and I made suitable replies. He then went away, and Zenobia was sent for to the clerk's office. There can be no doubt upon the point that this man came here on her account. You see how relentlessly bad luck pursues me.

"An hour later Zenobia returned, and I wished to renew negotiations at the point they had been left off. I began speaking of the mission confided to me by Lucien, and I dwelt upon the sacred promise that I had made him to bring his uncle's will back with me. She let me go on for a while, but she presently replied, with the utmost coolness: 'That gentleman who was talking to you just now, and who sent for me, says that he has been sent by Lucien Bellefond, too. Which of you am I to believe?'

"I must admit that I found nothing to say. I had not expected such a trick as that. This rascal, this robber, is playing my game, it appears. He has come here to swindle this woman out of the colonel's will. In whose interest? Can it be to sell it to the lieutenant, or to the heir-at-law? This last supposition is the most likely.

"Be it as it may, I saw at once that my game was blocked, and that I could not obtain anything more from the sutler-woman. I then greatly regretted that I had allowed myself to be put in prison. Once there, no one knows how long he may stay. Besides, I said to myself that Gardilan, who must have a long arm, might advise the authorities to keep me there. Fortunately, I got off after ten days spent in anxiety and weariness. My papers were examined, and I was set free yesterday, after being well lectured for the trick that I had played the commissary by hiding my passport.

"I then returned to the hotel, where I found the worthy truffle-dealer and the man with the bushy moustaches, who made up a ridiculous story to account for his visit to the prison.

"You see, my poor Julie, that after so many careful efforts, all must now be begun again on a new basis. Well, all the same, I do

not despair. My antagonist does not give up either, but he has not succeeded any better than I have, and I have one advantage over him. He must be in doubt as to the very existence of the will, whereas I have a certainty, as I possess Zenobia's letter.

"I have made an important discovery in that respect. This letter was not in her handwriting, for she can neither read nor write. I have positive proof of that; and, if she did not write it, she dictated it. To whom? That is the point. To some one who may have gone to Paris, and taken the will with her. This I shall soon find out. All that I can now tell you, my dear Julie, is that I am on a new track, and this time I believe it to be the right one.

"Quiet Clarisse as well as you can. Yours for life,

"LUC BONNIN."

"MONSIEUR GUILLAUME FRANTZ,

"Cashier at M. Machefer's,

"9 Rue Montmartre, Paris.

"PÉRIGUEUX, 29th August, 1815.

"My dear Lucien,—I have something new to tell you this time, and you will forgive me for remaining so long without writing when you know what I have been doing for the last three weeks. I know that Frantz has shown you the business letters that I have regularly addressed to him ever since I left. You cannot be anxious, therefore, and as I wished to tell you something definite, I have waited till now.

"Yes, I have something to tell, and this is what it is. You will remember that I found myself in the company of two fellows whom I suspected of having come, like myself, on account of the colonel's money. As to one, it was certain, as the man with the white tie was Bonnin. The other one was watching him, that was clear, and I wondered why; I now know, and will tell you. You will be greatly surprised.

"In my first letter I told you that I was trying to get into the good graces of these people, so as to find out what they were up to. I have succeeded beyond my hopes. With Bonnin, my intercourse was stopped by his imprisonment, for I must tell you that the cunning scamp had himself arrested as being without a passport. You will ask why. Well, I see too late that I ought to have begun at the beginning by telling you that our poor Zenobia has been put in prison. This happened shortly before I came here, and she is still in the city jail.

"Monsieur Gardilan, the man with the bushy moustaches, has very advantageous connections, owing to his being in search of horses for the government, and he contrived to visit the jail. But Bonnin had not the same facilities, and he was obliged to let himself be arrested so as to get at the sutler.

"Why was Zenobia imprisoned? you will ask. Because she was

accused of being an agent of Bonaparte, and in this they are all wrong. However, I return to my spies. They were more fortunate than myself, as they saw Zenobia every day, while I was vainly endeavouring to get at her. But Gardilan did not seem to be progressing, for he came back to the hotel every night with a long face, and drank very hard ; no doubt to console himself for his want of success.

"One evening, when he was quite tipsy, a man belonging to this part asked him to take a walk. As they were going out they met your farmer of Château Lévêque, whom I had sent for, and who informed me of something I should not otherwise have known. The man who had gone out with Gardilan was your uncle's business man ; and Gardilan is really your uncle's heir-at-law and nephew—Monsieur Maxime Trimoulac.

"Yes, my dear boy, he is your rival himself. You now know what this scamp has come here for. I see it very plainly ; but one thing puzzles me. I cannot understand how a nephew of Monsieur Lacaussade can be in the police force. However, your farmer tells me that this good-for-nothing fellow left his home and family after disgracing himself, and that he is supposed to have deserted from the army, and to have sold himself in the time of the Duke of Rovigo's sway. So it is not surprising that he should now be in the Duke of Otranto's pay.

"Be that as it may, I know his secret, whereas he does not know mine, as his man had never seen me with your farmer, and I have thus a great advantage over him. I took this into account in becoming more and more intimate with the rascal. He did not mistrust me, for he thought me deaf and stupid. At last, by dint of paying for his champagne, I so gained his confidence that he asked me last week to go with him to the prison.

"I must tell you that Bonnin was set free after ten days' confinement ; and, to his great regret, to judge from his face, he did not advance matters by being put in prison. Meanwhile, too, the so-called Gardilan had gone every day to visit Zenobia Capitaine, who still held out against him.

"You may imagine that I was sincerely glad when this proposition to visit the prison was made to me by my most dangerous antagonist. There is a providence ; I'm sure of it.

"Trimoulac, persuaded that I believed him to be Gardilan, told me, so as to induce me to go with him, that he had a service to ask of me. I leave you to imagine how much coaxing I needed. Well, we started for the prison together, and on the road he told me that he had a great interest in finding out whether a certain person had received a will from an officer, who had died during the retreat from Russia. He added that, unluckily, she did not fancy him, and that I might, perhaps, be more fortunate than he. I have such a good face, he said. I replied that I would do my best, although my deafness was a great drawback, and I added that the woman ought not to see

me with him. He understood that, so he merely introduced me to the keeper, and then went away. This is how I have succeeded in conversing for an hour every day with Zenobia Capitaine.

"But I am abusing of your patience, and I will not do so any longer. I have seen the good sutler-woman, and have learned from her own lips that she brought the colonel's will with her. He died at Smolensk, on the 5th of December, 1812. She declares that it will be easy to have proof of this by writing to the director of the hospital there, and she adds that he made you his sole heir.

"This is news, or I'm mistaken. Ah! I had trouble enough to get hold of it. At the two first interviews I only obtained obstinate denials. At the first, I did not have your medal with me; on the second occasion, I was not sure that we were not being watched, and dared not show it. The third time I made a firm attempt. I began by telling her the real situation of affairs, and how and why I had come; the attempts of the man with the gold spectacles as regards you; the purpose of Trimoulac, the heir-at-law; the proposal which he had made to me, and my pretence of accepting it. Then I showed her the medal, and pointed out the cross that she had made upon it fifteen years previously. This was decisive, and Zenobia then told me all.

"I shall tell you myself exactly what she said, for I shall start to-morrow for Paris. In the meanwhile, this is briefly how things stand: Zenobia had the will, but she has not got it now. When she reached Périgueux last June, knowing that you must be in Paris, but being ignorant of your address, she wrote to you on a mere chance, with the hope that you would receive her letter through the War Office. How did it miss you? I cannot imagine; but I keenly suspect that it fell into Bonnin's hands, and this would explain his visits to the post-office. The day after she wrote she received a letter from you. Do not be alarmed, however. The signature was false, and everything leads me to believe that the note was written by Trimoulac, whom an agent had no doubt informed of the sutler-woman's arrival, and of the rumours as to the existence of a will to your advantage.

"You understand why I think so, do you not? A false address was given to Zenobia as yours, and she was advised to set out at once for Paris, where she would be expected at the address given.

"Now, I must tell you that Zenobia is quite illiterate. When I said just now that she had written to you, I should have said that she had had a letter written to you. By whom? By the person who undertook to read the forged letter to her. This person, who is a woman of this place, a young peasant woman who knew you, so she said, when a boy, and who is Zenobia's niece, immediately set out for Paris with the will. How is it that you have never heard anything of her? She evidently went to the false address, which Zenobia, unfortunately, could not remember; but what became of the young woman afterwards? Neither her aunt nor I can tell

that, and that is what I wish to find out as soon as I return to Paris.

"I told Gardilan that the prisoner had refused to tell me anything, and I think that he is now tired out, and will return to Paris. I believe also that your friend of the Rue d'Enfer will do the same.

"However, I do not care for either of them now. I know that the will is in the hands of a woman whose name I have, with a description of her person. We must now find her, and we shall soon do so, I promise you.

"Remember me to all, and do not forget your old friend,

"TIMOLEON MACHEFER.

"P.S.—When you are a millionaire, we must obtain Zenobia Capitaine's release, and I hope that we shall be able to do so, and then I will take her into my shop to sell retail goods."

XII.

WHILE Timoleon Machefer was thus running after luck in Périgord, Lucien Bellefond was leading the quietest life imaginable in the Rue du Jour, and he had never been so happy, for Thérèse loved him, and M. Vernède had forgiven him.

The banker had even been kinder than Lucien had hoped, for he had listened without a frown to the story of his misfortunes at the gaming-table, and had not uttered a single reproach. He complimented him upon his duel with the Prussian, while Thérèse blamed him for thus risking his life without regard for the anxiety of his friends. She blamed him also for trusting a stranger, and for not insisting sooner upon leaving the house in the Rue d'Enfer, where he had been kept a prisoner.

It seemed as though she had guessed that there was a woman there, although Lucien had carefully concealed from her the fact of Mademoiselle Clarisse's existence. However, she forgave everything, and was so happy in the presence of the lover whom she had mourned as dead, and whom she now saw every day, and talked with as to the future, that she forgot the past, and it all seemed like a dream to her.

The plan devised by Machefer was strictly conformed to. Lucien lived alone in his lodging on the second-floor, where no one came excepting the old servant, Frantz, and the little humpback, who was doing wonders in the shop, and showed the greatest devotion to his patron.

Every day, after the closing of the bank, M. Vernède came with his daughter and spent the evening with the convalescent. He was gentler and kinder than ever before, as though misfortune had made him more affectionate. Not only did he make no objection to the future marriage of the young lovers, but he associated himself with their hopes, and advised them as to their married life. However, when Lucien spoke of their commercial partnership, and of the large payment to be made on the 11th of September, he turned the conversation to other subjects, and replied evasively to the officer's questions.

He even seemed desirous of screening him from the financial troubles that threatened the bank, as though he no longer took into any account the promise which he had made of making him a partner. Lucien at first proposed to sell his farm in Périgord, as he had intended doing before he had taken it into his head to gamble. M. Vernède, however, firmly refused to allow this, and said a great

deal about the advantages of owning a piece of land, however small it might be, if it would but keep those who lived upon it, and serve as a refuge in misfortune.

He would not have spoken thus if he had not foreseen his own failure, and Lucien was struck by his persistence in looking forward to an inevitable catastrophe. The young man vainly reminded his friend that Machefer had gone to bring back a fortune, that his first letter promised success, and that all would be well if Lacaussade's will was in his favour.

M. Vernède was not led away, however, by these earnest assurances ; he shook his head without replying, or muttered a few words as to the necessity of taking precautions against possible reverses, and as to the prudence of anticipating the worst. This tendency to despair of everything was soon so evident, that Lucien finally gave up all attempt to make him take a more cheerful view of matters, and only thought of his own pleasure in seeing Thérèse every evening.

Time passed on, and even the arguments which he had made use of to comfort the banker failed him, for Machefer had ceased to write. "No news is good news," says the proverb, which, like all proverbs, is uncertain. And it was not applicable in this case ; for, if the provision merchant had found Zenobia, he would surely have made it known at once.

Lucien realised this, and said nothing. He bitterly deplored the fact that his uncle's fortune did not prevent the failure of Thérèse's father ; but he was almost consoled for his own part, and looked forward with pleasure to a quiet life with Thérèse on his little farm of Château Lévêque.

The entire month of August passed by, and the lovers were happy in each other's society, while the banker remained sad, resigned, uncomplaining. It was evident that this resolute man wished to keep his grief and anxiety to himself, in order not to interfere with his daughter's happiness.

Twice, however, after Timoleon's departure, Vernède had departed from his habitual reserve. The first time, which was soon after the purveyor had left, he broke out fiercely against the men of the old system. Lucien, who was somewhat surprised by this, took the liberty of questioning him, and found that his indignation arose from a visit paid him by a certain Countess des Orgeries, the aunt of the Marquis de Baffey.

This old lady had taken upon herself to come into his office, like a whirlwind in petticoats, and bluntly propose for the banker's daughter on the marquis's behalf. She had done this with the utmost coolness, and without any preamble whatever. Vernède had received her very coldly, but he had not succeeded in preventing her from saying a great deal about mésalliances, the honour her nephew was doing him by proposing to marry a woman destitute of rank, and the immenso fortune which she meant to leave him, all

this being accompanied by the most astounding remarks about Voltaire, the Count de Provence, and Jean Jacques Rousseau.

He had finally succeeded in telling the feather-brained dame that he declined the alliance, and he had got rid of her; but he had not recovered his calmness when he saw Lucien in the evening, and he made use of some very strong expressions of displeasure.

The lieutenant's feelings were not the same, however. He had been angry at first at the thought that a rival was attempting to win Thérèse from him, but a look at the gay young girl, when she heard her father's story, reassured him as to the impression made by the marquis's offer. He then remembered that Vernède owed that gentleman three hundred thousand francs, which were payable on the 11th of September, and he felt the deepest admiration for the man who did not hesitate to sacrifice his honour for the happiness of his daughter and his own political opinions.

It would seem that the countess did not return, for nothing more was said about her or her noble nephew; but one night Vernède came to Lucien's lodgings with an anxious face. He again began to say bitter things about the nobility, and the government that had brought them back, but the beginning of his conversation was different from what it had been before, for he informed Lucien that rigorous measures of great severity were being taken against all who aspired to liberty, and that the officers of the old army were again under suspicion, while all secret societies were being ferreted out with unusual determination.

To the young officer's great surprise, he even mentioned some of the Freemasons as having been pointed out to the police, and proscribed with the utmost severity. He added that he had reason to think that his friend Timoleon might be compromised by his acquaintance with them, and that there was everything to be feared for him, for the "White Terror," as it was called in those days, was rampant, in the south especially.

Three weeks indeed had passed, and there was still no letter from Machefer. This was alarming. Vernède thought, too, that the house in the Rue du Jour would soon be watched, and that it would be best to leave it. Lucien, who had now recovered, was quite able to go out, and if he had not done so it was simply because Machefer had recommended to him to be prudent.

When the banker advised him to go away, and even to leave Paris and lodge in some lonely suburb, he hesitated about taking this course, which would, of course, prevent him from receiving the visits of Thérèse; but, as soon as he knew that Vernède and his daughter would see him again as soon as it would be prudent to do so, he consented to search for a lodging beyond the city walls.

The plan was unanimously approved of, and on the following day Lucien began his search. If he found a suitable lodging in the course of the day, he did not intend to return to the Rue du Jour, he meant simply to send his new address to Vernède, who would take

charge of all letters that might come for him under cover to Frantz, the cashier.

Thus, on the following day, Lucien went away at an early hour, not without bidding farewell to the worthy Frantz and little *Æsop*. Everybody was already astir in the busy neighbourhood when he went out into the street; but no one remarked him. His intention was to leave Paris quickly by the nearest barrier, for he had no special suburb in his mind.

He was not going into the country for the country's sake, and cared very little where he pitched his tent. The woods of Ville d'Avray or the meadows of Vertus were all one to him. Besides, he had been fighting from 1813 to 1814, and had little acquaintance with the environs of Paris; so that now he was obliged to trust to chance in looking for fresh lodgings. However, a very natural feeling drew him towards the north of the city. This was the part he had visited most often during the past year. Machefer had often taken him to the Moulin de la Galette to taste the Argenteuil wine or to eat some fried fish on the isle of Saint-Ouen.

He went along the Rue Montmartre, and still keeping to the right, he soon reached the Barrière Rochechouart, which he passed through.

As soon as he had left the walls behind him he saw the Butte Montmartre, and the sight of the arid height recalled remembrances that had of late almost faded from his mind.

He had gone but once into the caverns of Montmartre, but the circumstances had been so dramatic that he soon recalled every detail of the scene. It was under that mass of plaster that the Grand Mason had administered justice in so relentless a manner, and the mournful traces of the pitiless sectarians must still be visible.

Thus cogitating, Lucien took it into his head to look at the southern side of Montmartre to see whether he could find the opening to the quarry. He followed the street on the left, and finally came to the esplanade where he had sat one Sunday night with Timoleon Machefer, soon after the traitor had been walled up. The spot was lonely. There were only a few boys playing about and chasing one another through the open ground, and Lucien crossed the esplanade and kept near the hill without being noticed.

Broad daylight changes the aspect of places seen by night, and the young ex-mason, who had not been there since the thrilling events of the 2nd of July, could scarcely recognise the crevice in which he had hidden on that memorable occasion. He finally distinguished it by its sinuosities and the thick growth of the brambles at the entrance.

This was the narrow aperture by which the brethren had slipped in, bearing the condemned man tied up in a sack, and this was where he, Lucien Bellefond, had been driven out when he had rebelled against the hasty execution.

He naturally paused to look at this harmless-looking passage, which led into the frightful catacombs, and he had a strong desire to

enter the vault again, and look at the freshly-plastered pillar in which the traitor had found a tomb. But he fortunately remembered that he had no means of exploring the dark vaults, which it was dangerous even to enter with a torch, and made up his mind to go on.

However, at the first step he now took, he found himself face to face with a man, who suddenly rose up before him above a tuft of weeds, as though he had come from the bowels of the earth. This strange personage drew back at sight of Lucien; and then, undoubtedly remembering that it was too late to conceal himself, he left the crevice with a light leap and went off, turning his back on Lucien.

The latter was startled at first to see an unknown man come from a spot which he had supposed to be unknown to all but the masons themselves; but he remembered that it would be important for them and for him to know who had found out their secret. So he began to follow the stranger quietly, keeping him well in sight.

He had not had time to see him distinctly, and could not tell whether he was young or old. His gait and attire did not reveal anything, and he took good care not to turn round.

Lucien thought for a moment of trying to pass him in order to have a good look at him, but he reflected that this would attract the fellow's attention, and that it would be better to follow him until he had a chance of seeing his face.

Meantime, he thought over the matter, and indulged in various conjectures. There were but three reasonable suppositions. Either the man was a resident in the neighbourhood, whom curiosity or idleness had led into the opening without knowing that it conducted to the vast quarries within the height, and who, finding it so narrow and dark, had turned back, vowing never to be caught there again; or he was a spy sent to discover the den where the masons met; or simply a mason who had some reason for going there.

Lucien was inclined to believe him to be a spy. What Vernède had said as to the dangers threatening the secret societies led him to think so. At all events, it would be as well to find out, and Lucien therefore began to follow the man with determination.

This individual had at once turned towards the east and was going quickly along the narrow streets, where there were but few houses, and which conducted to the hamlet of Clignancourt. He presently came towards a wider and better-paved thoroughfare, which is now one of the most frequented streets of a crowded district of Paris, but which then was only the beginning of a royal road.

The man crossed it, and then, turning to the right, he quickly strode along towards a gate, which he opened and closed behind him. This gate stood in front of a small house rising up between court and garden, one of the few which stood apart from one another at intervals along the almost deserted road.

Lucien saw the man turn the corner of the house, which was built of brick, and he stopped short, for he felt greatly perplexed. It seemed easy enough to follow the man, as he had not closed the gate

with a key. But how would he be received in the isolated house, which, in spite of its neat appearance, might be some dangerous lair?

The man's neglect to close the gate behind him seemed an invitation to the imprudent to venture in. While Lucien was thus wisely reflecting, he went slowly towards the gate, and stopping in the middle of the road, began to examine the house attentively.

There were a door and two windows on the ground floor, and three windows on the first and only floor above. All the shutters, which seemed very heavy, were tightly closed. The place appeared to be an unoccupied house, but not a deserted one, for it was in good condition, and the court-yard was carefully kept. The garden behind was closed in by walls, and seemed to be attended to with care. Still, there was nothing to show that any living creature dwelt there, although a man had entered the place.

Lucien did not care to find out what it all meant by entering the house, but before going away he wished to know exactly where he was, so as to find the house again in case of need. He looked around him, and saw that he was on the *Chaussée de Clignancourt*.

He read this name upon a yellow sign, half-effaced by the rain, and suddenly it reminded him of the man walled up in the quarry. He remembered distinctly that his executioners had seized him, gagged him, and put him in the sack at No. 13 in that very street.

At this very moment, too, he caught sight of this number in black letters upon two posts at each side of the gate. Lucien's surprise was now extreme, and numerous thoughts rushed into his brain at once.

A man coming from the quarries, and going straightways to this house, where the unworthy Chevalier de Loupiac had been captured two months before by the "Companions of the Trowel"—it seemed incredible! With a little imagination Lucien might have fancied that the condemned man had escaped from his tomb, and come out to denounce his executioners.

He did not go as far as that in these conjectures, however, but he indulged in others, and not the least unlikely of these was the supposition that some friend of the dead man had ascertained the circumstances of his death, and was trying to investigate it, discover his murderers, and punish them.

Be that as it might, the strange encounter ought certainly to be reported to Vernède. Two days before, Lucien would not have ventured to speak of it to him, for he was not then aware that Machefer had confided the existence of the society to the banker. But, since Thérèse's father had told him of his anxiety with regard to the association, he thought that he was called upon to tell him all that related to it.

He decided, therefore, that he would slightly change his plans, and go that night to Vernède's house to inform him of this occurrence which he could not communicate in any other way. However, as he did not wish to waste the day, he made up his mind to follow

this road, which must end on the plain of Saint-Denis, and to look for a room in the first distant inn he found.

It was time for him to go off, for by remaining in front of the mysterious little house he would learn nothing whatever. The man had seen that he was being followed, and would not be so stupid as to reappear. And Lucien himself was in danger of being examined carefully, for there was nothing to show that the man from the quarry was not hiding behind the shutters and watching him.

Lucien turned aside at last, and walked rapidly away from the quiet house. Beyond it there were no houses save those of some kitchen-gardeners; and here and there a tavern, with a sign representing a pot of beer with the liquid flowing forth to replenish a goblet held by a grenadier, who is painted life-size in distemper.

The arbores of these drinking-shops had no one beneath their shade at that moment. It was neither Sunday nor Monday, and the working-people were toiling. It was very warm, and there seemed no reason for visiting a quarter where so little shade was found.

Lucien went on with his head down, and walking slowly, for he was in no hurry to engage his lodging outside of Paris, and the meeting with the stranger had made him thoughtful. He wondered what would be the result of it, and how he should manage to present himself at Vernède's house, for it had been agreed that he should not go there until Machefer's return.

Would it not be better to wait and to tell all to his old comrade, without frightening Thérèse's father with his perhaps idle fears, when he had such troubles of his own already? That might be the best course; and yet who could say when the purveyor would return from his hazardous trip to Périgord?

Lucien finally reverted to his first idea of going that night to the Rue des Bourdonnais. By taking a few precautions he thought that he could go there unnoticed, and in order to make sure that he had not been followed, he turned several times as he went up the road. There was no one to be seen, for the whole length of the highway was visible, and nothing had stirred in the little lonely house. Having made sure of this, the young fellow walked on faster, so as to get out of the hot open space as rapidly as possible. He saw that far ahead there were some houses belonging to one of the wretched hamlets which then disfigured the approaches to the great city—some squalid buildings which cropped up at the dusty wayside.

This ugly hamlet was apparently full of laundries, for linen of all kinds was displayed behind the houses. Lucien could not fancy any Parisians living in such an abominable conglomeration of tumble-down hovels; but then he had determined to lodge in some house where he was sure that no one would be inclined to look for him. He therefore went on, making up his mind to inquire about the locality of some sun-burned peasants whom he saw prowling about beyond the outspread bed-linen.

But at that moment a distant sound made him turn round. It

was a dull, regular tramp, like that of the tide coming in and swelling rapidly. Soon Lucien heard the steps of horses, and it became evident that there was a troop of galloping cavalry near at hand. The first thought that occurred to our young friend was that they were in pursuit of him. He was even about to leave the road, but he restrained himself, for he remembered that a whole squad is never sent after one man, and the police do not proceed so openly.

He soon had proof that it was not he who was being chased, for on turning round he saw at the end of the road that merely a few cavalry soldiers were coming along ahead of a carriage which was rolling rapidly. The men's helmets glittered in the sun, and sparks flew from the pavement.

There was but one man in Paris whose escort could be so showy, and whose equipage could dash along so fast, and that was Louis XVIII. Lucien had often heard of the mad rush which took place every day when the gouty sovereign drove through the streets, and he at once realised that it was the king who was about to pass. Accordingly he stood back to avoid being run over, for he knew that the royal carriage did not turn aside for any one, but ever went ahead with marvellous rapidity.

This was one of the slightest eccentricities of a man who, as a monarch, was sagacious and of moderate views. It was certainly a strange way of enjoying a drive. However, King Louis XVIII.'s gouty legs condemned him to perpetual immobility, and he longed to go through the streets with this mad haste, so as to indulge in some form of rapid motion, as all other was forbidden him by his infirmities.

After the council had met, the king as a rule climbed into a huge open landau, and started off with a few of his horse-guards. The postillions had orders to ride on as fast as they could, and the unfortunate guardsmen often had great trouble in keeping up with them. There was not a day without a downfall, and some rider was often badly injured.

However, this trifling drawback did not prevent his majesty from continuing his three hours' drive, or choosing the worst roads, those which were badly paved, and which were unattractive—such, for instance, as the highways of Saint-Ouen and Choisy. The appointed distance having been covered, the monarch would return to the Tuileries without allowing man or beast to breathe for an instant.

On that day Louis XVIII. had changed his usual route, but not his usual pace.

Lucien had scarcely caught sight of the escort before they reached that point of the road where he had stopped. The landau came along, and Lucien could spy the calm face of the Bourbon king in the midst of a cloud of dust. The greater part of the escort followed at the same time, no one noticing him.

However, the officer in command, whose horse was either tired

or restive, had remained somewhat in the rear, and when he passed in front of the young ex-lieutenant, the latter immediately recognised him.

It was the Marquis de Baffey.

Lucien had not seen his rival since the day when they had met at Vernède's office. But the features of the marquis had remained fixed in his memory. Hate does not forget, and that of the lieutenant had not died away.

He remembered every detail of their meeting, and would have recognised the proud nobleman's cold and haughty face anywhere.

M. de Baffey's memory was probably as faithful, but as he went by he did not look at the lieutenant, who had stood back to see him pass. He was endeavouring at the moment to master his horse, a superb thoroughbred bay, evidently of English origin.

This animal was as restless as it was powerful, and its rider had great trouble in managing it.

He had been delayed by his contest with the animal, and was now trying to get back to his proper place on the right of the escort, which had kept up beside the royal landau. The English horse, which had been violently curbed after a stout contest, was still defending itself by the most unexpected bounding and jibbing, and it required a great deal of skill on the part of the rider to enable him to keep his seat.

However, the officer of the Black Musketeers was not to be shaken off, and as he passed by, firm in his stirrups, with his figure erect, his head high, and his sword at his side, he looked so superb that Lucien could not help admiring, or rather envying him; for, between rivals, admiration is almost the same as envy.

The marquis, firmly grasping the reins, and controlling his horse to perfection, now urged it forward by a vigorous pressure of his thighs, wishing to cover the distance which lay between him and the equipage, and he would soon have done so if, unfortunately, the horse had not suddenly slipped and fallen.

The shock was terrible.

M. de Baffey was unseated and thrown forward with terrible violence; he fell head foremost on the ground, where he lay quite motionless. The horse tried to rise, but fell again—one of its legs was broken.

Meantime, the carriage was still rolling along rapidly, and not a soldier in the escort had returned to pick up the officer.

Whoever fell during the royal drives was very badly off. The carriage horses still galloped on, and would have done the same, indeed, if every man in the escort had been thrown.

That day the equipage rapidly disappeared behind the first houses of the hamlet which closed in the landscape, and Lucien found himself alone with M. de Baffey, who lay unconscious in the middle of the road.

It may be that when he saw his rival fall his first impulse was one

of satisfaction rather than pity. Love is cruel. But he soon returned to better feelings, and running up to the unfortunate marquis, he found him to be in a pitiable condition.

His helmet had rolled off, and blood was flowing from a wound upon his forehead. He gave no sign of life, and Lucien was at first inclined to believe that he had been killed by his fall.

However, when he bent over him he saw that he still breathed, so he tried to help him as well as he could. He knelt down, unbuttoned the marquis's uniform, and then with his handkerchief stanching the blood that flowed from his wound. M. de Baffey murmured a few unintelligible words, but that was all.

Lucien saw that he was fainting, and tried to raise him up as well as he could ; but he was beginning to feel puzzled as to what he had better do. What help could he give the injured man ? He could not remain there till some one happened to pass, and he could not carry him even as far as the nearest house without assistance.

He had every reason to avoid compromising himself, and he realised that it would be folly to mix himself up in a mishap which had befallen one of the king's guardsmen, and in which the officer might lose his life.

However, he could not make up his mind to leave him in the road, where he might expire if he were not helped. And thus he was in a state of great perplexity when he heard a man calling out to him : "I am coming to help you, sir."

Indeed, soon afterwards a person ran up to him in great haste.

Lucien turned and saw that the stranger was a well-dressed man, with a somewhat military bearing, and jet black moustaches, very carefully waxed.

The new-comer's face awoke a confused recollection in the ex-lieutenant's mind, but he did not dwell upon it, and simply thanked him for coming.

"That is very natural," replied the stranger, "I was walking behind you, and saw this brave officer fall."

At this Lucien could not help feeling some surprise. Ten seconds before the escort had passed by, he had looked towards the city and had not seen any one near by. The man lied, and if he had seen the accident at all, he must have witnessed it from some window near by.

The thought that he had seen it from No. 13 passed through the lieutenant's mind, but what reason had he to think that ? It would have been imprudent on the part of an individual attempting to conceal himself after coming out from the quarry, to leave his hiding-place for the sake of talking to the man who had followed him a few moments before.

Besides, his dress was not the same as that of the man whom Lucien had seen before, and he could scarcely have changed his attire. Accordingly, the young ex-lieutenant kept his thoughts to himself, and replied : "This man ought to be taken at once to some place where he might be attended to by a physician."

"Yes, certainly, to his own house, if possible."

"Unfortunately, I do not know where he lives."

"Wait, sir, wait! Here is a pretty pocket-book, in which we shall find out what we want to know, I fancy."

With these words he picked up a little memorandum book which had fallen from the officer's pocket, and which Lucien had not noticed.

"Here is a card," said the new-comer, and he read the inscription upon it aloud:

"THE MARQUIS HENRI DE BAFFEY,
"19 Rue de Varennes."

Lucien knew the name well enough already, and he decided to remember the address.

"Dear me! that is a great way off," added the stranger, "and we could not take the gentleman there."

"While you watch over him, I can go and fetch a coach," said Lucien, who would have been glad to get away.

"Here is one that heaven has sent us," retorted the stranger, at that moment catching sight of a coach that was coming from the village.

"It may be occupied," suggested Lucien, "and it would be better to——"

"No matter. Those who may be inside won't refuse to let a wounded man get in; but we need not worry about that point, as I can see already that the vehicle is empty."

Lucien made no further objection. He would have been glad to go, but he was afraid that an abrupt departure might seem strange, and so he waited.

The coach was indeed empty, and the driver stopped as soon as he was called to.

"Get down," shouted the stranger, "and help us to put this officer into your coach."

"An officer—a wounded officer?" replied the driver. "Oh no, indeed! I'm not such a fool."

"What do you say, you rascal?"

"I say that I know to my cost what it is to carry people about when they have been fighting duels. Eight days' imprisonment and my coach in the pound. That is what I got only recently for doing an act of kindness."

"There hasn't been any duel, you fool!" retorted the stranger. "Don't you see that this officer has been hurt by a fall from his horse? Come, you must take him home, and you shall be well paid for it."

The driver seemed to hesitate for an instant, but he made up his mind to obey. When he alighted from his seat, Lucien, who had listened rather absently, began to look at him. He was a red-faced fellow, with a sullen expression, wearing a coat adorned with multitudinous capes.

After a moment Lucien recognised him. It was the driver of the coach in which he had fought the Prussian officer,

This was certainly unlucky, but it did not seem likely that anything unpleasant would result from the encounter, as the driver did not seem to know Lucien again. It would have been strange if he had, as he had barely seen his face that dark night on the Place Louis XV.

However, Major von Gruner's whilom antagonist did not care to prolong the interview with this dangerous witness of his duel.

"I will help you to put the wounded man into the carriage," said he to the stranger, "and I trust that you will undertake to go home with him."

"Alone! that is impossible, my dear sir!" exclaimed the man who had come up so opportunely. "This officer may be dying, and I do not wish him to expire in my arms. Now-a-days, such a thing might be turned against one. If an officer of the king's escort died a violent death while alone with me, that would be enough to make matters unpleasant for me, and I must have you as a witness of what really occurred."

"My testimony would do no good," stammered Lucien.

"Excuse me, it would do a great deal of good," replied the unknown, emphatically. "And I must add that you have the first right to speak in the matter, for it was you who first helped this gentleman after his fall. He belongs to you, and heaven forbid that I should dispute him with you! If you refuse to go with me I shall refuse to go at all, and I shall confide to you the task and honour of saving this gentleman."

Lucien's perplexity was very great. Whatever might be his dislike for M. de Baffey, he was unwilling to desert him, and he realised that if this very suspicious stranger saw him go off he would follow him again.

By accompanying him, on the contrary, to the Rue de Varennes, he would perhaps obtain some enlightenment about him, and he made up his mind to slip away from him as soon as they had taken the marquis home.

"True," he now replied aloud, "it will be better for two of us to watch over this gentleman. I have some urgent business to attend to, but I will put it off till to-morrow."

"I also have business in this neighbourhood," said the stranger, with a shrug of the shoulders; "but humanity above all things. Come, help us," he added, calling out to the driver, who was looking on sulkily.

They all helped, and the marquis was soon laid upon the cushions of the coach, after which the maimed horse was dragged to the side of the road, and left there.

Lucien and the obliging but mysterious stranger then got in beside the injured man, and started for the Rue de Varennes.

The trip was a silent one at first, for the two men were watching one another. However, after some ten minutes or so, M. de Baffey opened his eyes and said to Lucien, whom he recognised:

"Thanks, sir. I should not have expected anything else from such an enemy as you are, and I shall not forget that you have helped me."

Then, exhausted by the effort, he again fainted away upon the knees of his rival, who was greatly affected.

"You did not tell me that you knew him," said the gentleman with the black moustaches, in a malicious tone.

"I! You are mistaken, sir. I never saw him before," replied Lucien immediately.

"That is strange!" was the retort. "I thought that he was complimenting you upon having helped him, although you were his enemy. Enemies are usually acquainted with one another at the least."

"He must be delirious," replied Lucien; "people always are when there is concussion of the brain."

"Yes, it may be delirium," retorted the stranger in the tone of a man who still has his doubts.

He then said no more, and as Lucien was not disposed to talk, the rest of the ride passed by in silence.

Meanwhile the injured man did not appear to grow either better or worse, and the coach finally stopped outside a very handsome house in the Rue de Varennes at the moment when the carriage-way was being opened to let out a cumbrous-looking vehicle, drawn by two fine horses.

A footman, who was about to climb up behind this carriage, darted forward to drive off the shabby vehicle that dared to bar the way of so elegant an equipage.

However, the stranger quickly popped out his head and said to the lackey: "We are bringing your master, who has been seriously hurt."

At this announcement, which was made in a clear and distinct tone of voice, a woman was heard to utter a cry, and then the carriage drew back to let the hired conveyance enter the court-yard.

At the moment when Lucien alighted on one side, the stranger doing the same on the other, he found himself face to face with an old lady with powdered hair, who was attired in the style prevalent during the latter part of the reign of Louis XV. He had never seen her, but he easily guessed who she was. This dowager, dressed in brocaded silk, was evidently the marquis's aunt, the frivolous old fool who had acted so eccentrically at Vernède's office.

It was indeed the Countess des Orgeries who was settling her hoops, shaking her complicated head-dress, and raising her hands to heaven.

"My nephew! let me see my nephew!" she screamed.

Then, when she saw the marquis lying upon one of the seats of the coach as pale as death and covered with blood, she immediately began to launch forth imprecations, in which she mingled the Liberals, the Count de Provence, and Fouché, the regicide.

In the excess of her despair the good lady was quite unable to understand the accident that had befallen her nephew, and she did not think of asking those about her how it had happened.

The servants had all come out, and in the twinkling of an eye the marquis was carried to his room, for he lived in his aunt's house.

The driver of the coach remained unnoticed, and he at once drove out of the yard, while Lucien followed with the stranger. They were not even thanked for their kindness. The door-keeper closed the heavy gates of the carriage entrance, and that was all.

"Such is the gratitude of noblemen," said the man with the waxed moustaches, in a half-mocking, half-serious tone. "And now, my dear sir," added he, "where shall I take you?"

"Nowhere, thank you. I live near by, and I can go on foot. Let me pay for the coach and leave it to you."

"Oh, no! I cannot allow that. You live near by, do you? All the more reason for leaving you at your own door."

As the stranger spoke he looked Lucien straight in the face, and Thérèse's lover felt that he was caught. It was evident that this man was determined to know where he lived. He could not get rid of him upon any false pretext whatever, and opposition would merely make him more determined.

Lucien thought for a moment of going to the door of some house or other and pretending that he resided there; however, it did not appear probable that this stratagem would deceive the stranger. He would have watched him till he saw him come out again.

At this moment Lucien had an idea. "As you are so kind, sir," said he, "I will go to the Rue Montmartre, at the corner of the Rue du Jour; I have some one to call upon there, and if that suits you we will share the expense of the vehicle together."

"With the greatest pleasure, my dear sir," exclaimed the stranger.

Lucien meanwhile was saying to himself: "I will only stay at Machefer's long enough to throw this fellow off the track. At dusk I will slip out and go to Monsieur Vernède's and tell him what has happened to-day. He will advise me as to what I had better do. At all events, I shall not sleep at home, and if they come to arrest me to-morrow, they won't find any one."

Little was said on the way, for the stranger seemed to be thoughtful; and Lucien on his side was not inclined to speak.

Just as the coach conveying them stopped at the corner of the Rue du Jour, another coach turned the corner, and stopped in front of the first door on the left. At the same moment a man alighted with a valise in his hand; and the stranger in his turn got out.

"What! is it you?" they both exclaimed at one and the same time.

Lucien, who had not yet alighted, saw what was going on, but did not understand it. He hastily jumped down, and then his astonishment was unbounded. For the person who had come from the other coach, and who had exclaimed, "Is it you?" was none other than Timoleon Machefer.

And it was still more astonishing to see Machefer fervently embrace the individual with the waxed moustaches.

How had the two men become acquainted? Lucien had scarcely time to ask himself this question, for the person who had helped him to remove Monsieur de Baffey said:

"Excuse me, sir, for having forgotten you for a moment. I have unexpectedly found—and I am delighted at my luck—a most agreeable travelling companion of mine, whom I left only a few days ago, when I returned to Paris. I could not resist giving him a hug. However," he added, "it seems to me that you know him too."

And, indeed, Lucien had indicated that Machefer was no stranger by holding out his hand to him, in his first impulse.

"Yes," said the purveyor, in order to prevent Lucien from making some mistake, "this young man is one of my clerks, and I am glad that he has met with a gentleman like you."

"The pleasure is all on my side. Your clerk is very agreeable society, and I am glad that I was able to help him to do a good action. He will tell you all about it, for I must take my leave."

"As you please, my dear sir," answered Machefer immediately, with suave politeness.

"How is business getting on? Are you pleased with your trip? Truffles will sell well this year, no doubt. So much the better! Good-bye. Allow me to keep the coach."

Then, without waiting for a reply, the stranger leaped into the coach and said a word to the driver, who whipped up his horses and disappeared with his vehicle round the corner of the Rue Montmartre.

The two friends stared at one another in utter amazement.

"Will you please explain to me——" began Lucien, after a moment's silence.

"I was about to ask you to explain to me," interrupted Machefer; "but this is not the place to do so, and I fear that we have but little time at our disposal. Go up to your room and I will follow."

The young man obeyed in utter amazement, and his friend joined him after a few moments had elapsed.

"Do you know who that rascal with the moustaches is?" inquired the purveyor.

"No; I asked you to tell me just now."

"Have you no idea?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Then you did not receive my letter?"

"Yes, I've had one letter—telling me that you had reached Périgueux."

"Ah! yes; the one that I sent off on the 29th did not go till the next day, and will not reach you till to-night. I came in a post-chaise as fast as I could, so that I am half-a-day ahead of the mail."

"Then you have brought me some news?" asked Lucien, eagerly.

"I should say so! Judge by this little bit. The man who was with you just now is the same man who travelled with me in the

coach to Périgueux, the man who was watching Bonnin, and whom Bonnin on his side was watching."

"Bah !"

"But as you have not received my last letter, you do not know his real name."

"No."

"Well, my dear boy, that gentleman is your promising cousin."

"My cousin ! I have no cousin that I know of," said Lucien, still bewildered.

"The nephew of your uncle by marriage, if I must dot the i's."

"What ! Maxime——"

"Yes, indeed, Maxime Trimoulac, who travelled with me under the name of Jean Gardilan," replied Machefer, "and who said that he was going to Périgord to buy horses for the king's guards. Now do you understand why he went there ?"

"On account of the will, I suppose."

"Yes ; that was it ; and, like me and Bonnin, he also was looking for Zenobia Capitaine."

"He must have heard that she had my uncle's will, then ?" said Lucien.

"It appears so," replied Machefer, "for I can assure you that he went there to see her. Fortunately his expedition was to no purpose."

"I cannot understand it," mused Thérèse's lover. "To go about like that, with a false name and the ways of a detective, such as you described in your first letter—why, this Maxime Trimoulac must be——"

"One of the police. Yes, he is," rejoined Machefer. "And he must be an important man in the force, for the authorities of the place did whatever he asked."

"I was not wrong, then, in my surmises," muttered Lucien, as his face clouded over.

"What do you mean ? Has he been spying upon you, too ?" was the eager inquiry. "How did you happen to be with him ? Where and how did you meet him ?"

"Accidentally, and in the strangest way. A number of coincidences of the most singular kind have occurred. I went out to-day——"

"In spite of my warnings ?"

"Monsieur Vernède advised me to go somewhere else and find a lodging in the suburbs," replied Lucien. "It seems that your house is being watched."

"Good ! that caps the climax," said Machefer, frowning. "Pray, go on !"

"Well, I went beyond the Barrière, and was looking for an inn or a lodging house, when all at once the king's landau came up as fast as it could, as usual. I stood aside in order not to be run over. Just at that moment the officer at the head of the escort was thrown, his horse fell, and I rushed to help him up."

"What an idea ! To help a guardsman, a royalist !"

"Bah ! he is a man, after all ; and you would have done the same if you had been in my place. But guess who it was ?—none other than the Marquis de Baffey !"

"The fellow who has those three hundred thousand francs in the hands of Thomas Vernède, and who wishes——"

"Who wishes to marry Mademoiselle Vernède. Yes, it was he. Was not that a strange chance ?"

"So strange that it scarcely seems possible," replied Machefer, looking glum. "But how about Trimoulac ?"

"He was behind me while I was helping the marquis to rise, and I neither heard him come up nor saw where he came from. However, he offered to help me to carry the injured man. Then a coach passed by, and, strange to say, it was the very coach that I rode in when I fought with that Prussian major !"

"That was bad."

"Fortunately the driver did not know me again—at least I believe not. I got in, much against my will, with that stranger, whom I instinctively mistrusted, and whom I tried to get rid of, but it was impossible. He remained with me until I took Monsieur de Baffey to a house in the Rue de Varennes, where that foolish old creature, his aunt, lives."

"The woman who made such a scene in Thomas's office ?" inquired Machefer.

"Yes, the very same. Well, after I had got rid of the marquis, I tried to get rid of that fellow Trimoulac. But no, he held on to me, and gave me no peace till I came here. If I had not met you, perhaps I should not have got rid of him at all. It seems certain that he wished to find out where I lived."

"Of course he did ! Do you know what my advice would be, Lucien ?"

"No—but, pray, let me have it."

"I advise you to go away."

"I intended to do so."

"I will add that you had better go at once ; but I must, first of all, tell you the news I bring. You ought to hear it without delay ; whereas, if we part, we may not meet again for more than twenty-four hours. Listen to what I have to say. I will be brief ; and, as Trimoulac does not know that you are going away, he may not have you disturbed to-day. Besides, whatever game he may be playing, he must form a plan ; and we have a few hours before us."

"I hope so. But before I listen to you let me tell you that one thing surprises me more than all the rest. If this fellow Trimoulac is spying upon me, he must know me. But how is it that he knows me ?"

"Who can say ? It suffices if he has ever met you before. Didn't you say that he had seen you when you were a boy ? He had not forgotten your face, perhaps."

"It may be so. Now tell me all about Zenobia. You saw her, eh?"

"I saw and talked with her at my ease," replied Machefer. "But Zenobia is not the person we want now."

"What do you mean?"

"It isn't she who has got the will."

"Indeed!"

"No. She did have it, but she has not got it now."

"What! has it been taken from her?"

"No; but she entrusted it to some one."

"To whom, pray?"

"To her niece."

"Her niece; then she has a niece?" And Lucien passed his hand over his forehead, as if he were getting bewildered.

"Yes," replied Machefer; "and you must have known her when you were a boy, for she was brought up with you at the farm of Château Lévéque, and you are only two or three years older than she was."

"What is her name?"

"Virginie."

"Virginie! Ah! yes—I remember," exclaimed Lucien. "Virginie Lasbaysses, was that the name?"

"Yes. She is the daughter of the sutler's sister," said Machefer.

"That sister was my nurse."

"Yes, you are right."

"I remember the girl very well, now that you have mentioned her. She was far more intelligent than it is usual for a girl to be."

"She continued intelligent, and even grew very smart, at least so it appears."

"But I cannot understand it all as yet," said Lucien, who certainly did look perplexed. "You say that this young girl has the colonel's will. But she was not in Russia, I presume?"

"No," replied Machefer. "Listen to me attentively, my dear boy, for you will not arrive at anything by idle guessing, and time presses. Let me tell you, in the first place, that your uncle died, not at Beresina, but a few days after the fray at Smolensk, to which place the Russians had removed him. The certificate of his death was made out at the military hospital there on the 5th December, 1812, and it will be easy to procure a copy. Before he died he made a will in your favour in his own handwriting, all duly dated and signed, and he confided it to Zenobia. Owing to circumstances, which it would take too long to recount, and which I must leave you to imagine, the sutler-woman, who was sent at first into the interior of Russia with other French prisoners, did not return until long after peace was signed. She arrived at Périgueux last June, at the very moment when you were fighting at Mont Saint-Jean."

"How is it that she did not write to me, in the meantime?" asked Lucien.

"You are going too fast. Let me tell you everything methodically, or else you will not understand it at all. Zenobia arrived at Périgueux and went to her sister's house. This sister is the mother of Virginie, and keeps a little haberdashery shop. Our good friend the sutler had learnt to be prudent by dint of accompanying the army, and instead of announcing, as many women would have done, that she was the bearer of a mission from Colonel Lacaussade, she began by making inquiries."

"That was wise, indeed," remarked Lucien, who was all attention.

"She then learnt," continued Machefer, "that Trimoulac was trying to get possession of his uncle's property, but had not yet succeeded in doing so. She also learnt that you had not been seen in Périgord for several years, and that you lived in Paris; but she could not obtain your address. She then thought of writing and trusting to chance in hopes you would get the letter."

"What! did Zenobia write to me?"

"Yes, my dear boy. She wrote, or rather dictated, a letter—for she cannot write at all. It was addressed to Monsieur Lucien Bellefond, lieutenant in the 25th Regiment of the Line, Paris, and it was posted on the 28th of June."

"But I never received it," protested the young ex-officer.

"You need not tell me that. If you had received it, the colonel's will would have been in your hands long ago."

"But, dear me! what became of the letter, then?" asked Lucien.

"I do not know for certain. I suspect, however, that it was not lost to everybody; and if you wish me to tell you my opinion, it is that it fell into the hands of that man Bonnin, the fellow who is trying to sell the will to you."

"If I thought that——"

"I should advise you to say nothing, even if you were sure of it. The harm is done on that side, and we cannot alter it; but the evil is not without a remedy, as this Bonnin was in Périgueux when I was there myself, and if he has returned to Paris, it is because he is no better off than when he started on the trip. The old rascal has sold the bear's skin before killing the bear; and I think that he is much less to be feared than Maxime Trimoulac. However, this is not all. You protested just now, when I told you that Zenobia had written to you. What would you say if I told you that you had answered her?"

"I?" exclaimed Lucien, with an air of bewilderment comical to behold.

"Yes, you. Or at least the letter which she received on the morrow of the day when her letter left for Paris was signed with your name."

"What did it contain?"

"An urgent request to come to Paris at once, where you were waiting for her; so it was stated."

"And the forger of the letter—for it was a forgery—probably gave my address?"

"I think not; but I must tell you that I did not see this letter bearing your name, and for a very good reason, which I will tell you of. As for Zenobia, who heard it read, she was not able to recall the name of the street in which you were said to live."

"And who can be the author of this infernal trickery?" gasped Thérèse's lover, in absolute consternation.

"Humph! I should not be surprised if it were Trimoulac," rejoined Machefer, "but we will look into all that later on. You must first be told what result this false letter led to. Zenobia a few days after her arrival made up her mind not to start for Paris in person, for she does not know her way about, but to send her niece there in her stead."

"That Virginie Lasbaysses, whom you mentioned—the girl I played with when I was a child?"

"Yes; she is now a young woman of twenty-two, as brave as a man, and smart enough to trick all Fouché's detectives. She has a powerful frame and a strong arm. She is exactly what her aunt was when young. Well, let me proceed. This girl, who is as bold as she is devoted, offered to take the will, and declared that she would keep out of all the traps that might be set for her, and would speedily find you in Paris. Zenobia accepted this almost heroic offer, and told her niece to write to you that she would come at once, which she did in the letter that you did not receive. The cunning sutler-woman had taken the precaution to say that it was she, not Virginie, who was coming. She thus hoped to throw any one off the scent, supposing the letter fell into the hands of any people who were badly disposed. Now this is what really happened——"

"It is perhaps lucky for us that she did so," interrupted the young ex-lieutenant.

"I think so; but let me finish," replied Machefer. "The aunt and niece were at this point when the false letter arrived. Then there was another difficulty. It was stated in this letter that Zenobia was expected in Paris in such a street, at such a number, by her dear Lucien Bellefond, whose name was appended to the missive. If she had taken the precaution to show this letter to your farmer down there, who knows your handwriting, she would have found out the trick at once; but she did not think of that, and had not time to make any inquiries. So Virginie, fitted out for the trip, went to wait for the coach at a stage beyond Périgueux; she there found a vacant seat, and started. It is needless to say that she had the colonel's will with her, together with the letter which was supposed to have come from you, and which, as it contained your address, was to help her to find your lodgings."

"That is why the sutler-woman could not show you the note," said Lucien.

"Exactly. And now, my dear friend, that is how we are situated."

"What ! hasn't Zenobia seen her niece since then ?"

"She has neither seen her nor heard from her," retorted Machefer, emphatically.

"This is very strange, indeed ! Still, the niece must have come to Paris !

"Everything leads me to believe so."

"But I have never seen her."

"That is not surprising, as she did not have your real address. What is surprising though, is that she did not look for you elsewhere when she failed to find you at the address given ; that she did not go to the Minister of War or the offices of the governor of Paris, and that then, finding her efforts to be vain, she did not return to Périgueux."

"The traitor must have got her to his house and have made away with her," said Lucien, with a frown.

"I thought of that ; but it does not agree with another supposition which seems to me very plausible. I believe that it was Trimoulac who wrote in your name. Now, if Virginie had gone to the address he gave her, whether he killed her or not, it is clear that he would not have gone to Périgueux in disguise, trying to get round the sutler-woman. He would have had the will in his possession and have destroyed it. Either it wasn't Trimoulac who forged your signature, or else Virginie did not go to his house when she reached Paris."

"There is nothing to be said in such a dilemma as this. However, we must find out what has become of her."

"I have returned for the express purpose of looking for her," replied Machefer.

"And do you hope to succeed ?"

"Yes ; but it will take time, and I fear that we have but little before us."

"True ; for Monsieur Vernède has to make his payment to the marquis."

"That is not everything ; the thing is that we may be arrested. I am more mistrustful than ever of that scamp Trimoulac. I wish I knew where the rascal lives."

"Didn't he tell you ?" asked Lucien.

"He was not such a fool," replied Machefer. "He gave me his card with 'Jean Gardilan, horse-dealer, No. 175 Rue du Gros-Caillon,' upon it ; but you may well believe that that address is as false as the name was. I shall not take the trouble to go there. And you know no more than I do about it, I suppose ?"

"I know even less. He did not give me any false name, for he did not speak of his name at all while we were together."

"I suppose not. Monsieur Trimoulac belongs to the political police, I presume, and does not commit any imprudent act. See how quickly he works ! He must have reached Paris last night, only a few hours before me, and yet he is already at our heels."

"But that is purely accidental."

"How do you know? Where did you meet him?" inquired Machefer, who was looking anxious.

"I have already told you. He came up at the moment when I was helping the marquis on the road."

"Yes, I remember now." And the purveyor became thoughtful. "You did not hear him coming, nor see where he came from?" he added.

"No; but I have a suspicion."

"What is it?"

"A moment before this affair I was passing the Buttes Montmartre, and, to my very great surprise, I caught sight of a man coming out of the opening——"

"What! the entrance of the cavern?"

"Yes, my friend; I am sure of that."

"The devil!" growled Machefer. "This is quite alarming! Who was this man?"

"I do not know him."

"How was he dressed? Did he look like a workman, or a shopman, or what?"

"He looked more like a man in comfortable circumstances, so far as I could see, for he had his back to me."

"You followed him, I suppose?"

"At once, and I did not let him get out of sight. Unfortunately, he did not once turn, and, when he was a few hundred paces ahead, he went into a house."

"Where you did not dare to follow him?"

"No; I was afraid of some trap."

"You were right, perhaps, but let us return to Trimoulac. What has he to do with this?" said Machefer.

"Well, the accident to the marquis took place near the house in question, and there was no one in sight at the moment when the horse fell, that is, excepting the king's escort. When I suddenly found a man behind me it occurred to me that this fellow was perhaps the same one whom I had been following, and who had been looking through some crack in the shutters, and had come out to follow me in his turn."

"Was he dressed in the same way?"

"No, or it appeared not to me. But he may have changed his clothes."

"And this man was Trimoulac, eh?"

"So you have just informed me yourself."

Machefer reflected for a moment, and then he said: "All this agrees very well. It may be that on his return from Périgueux, before he had even taken off his boots, he found some orders from Fouché awaiting him, concerning the Freemasons; we must have been denounced over and over again since the return of the Bourbons. He had heard of the meetings in the quarry; he had been told of the

secret passage, and as he is very active, he went there himself just to reconnoitre. You say that he allowed you to follow him without looking back, and took refuge in a house——"

"An isolated house where he must live all alone."

"And where, hidden behind the shutters, he could see you. Ah! ah! Well, and so then, having recognised you, he followed you to find out where you lived. You had probably been pointed out to him as a mason, but he perhaps knows all, that you are a rival as regards the colonel's inheritance, and that is a reason the more for his keeping after you. So, as I said before, you must go away." The ex-army purveyor paused for a moment, and then resumed: "I have certain measures to take to ensure my own personal safety, for he has found me now. The rascal isn't fool enough to believe that you are my clerk, he must have already guessed that I have been assisting you as regards the affair of the will. We were the best friends in the world while we were in Périgueux, and he fully believed what I told him, as he confided in me. Here, however, we shall be enemies, and I must be prepared for the onslaught."

"I am afraid that we shall be defeated," said Lucien, who had a mournful expression of face.

"Bah! we must not be discouraged, although it be an ill wind that blows no good. At least this mishap enables us to discover where Trimoulac lives, and that is a piece of information I particularly wished for. Where is the house which he entered so as to escape you?"

"It is No. 13 Chaussée de Clignancourt."

"That is strange! It seems to me that I have heard of that house before," muttered Machefer.

"You have heard it mentioned, and under circumstances that you can scarcely have forgotten," replied Lucien, lowering his voice.

"When? where?"

"Why, in the vaults at Montmartre, on the night of the walling-up. Surely you recollect."

"Ah! yes. I remember now. It was there that that vile Chevalier de Loupiac was captured, the fellow whose defence you undertook."

"And who was walled up in spite of my objections."

"Yes; and the Grand Mason was obliged to turn you out to quiet you. But are you sure that the house is the same?"

"I saw the name of the street, and the number of the house with my own eyes," replied Lucien.

"Well, it is very strange! but, perhaps, it is less so than it appears. Why shouldn't Trimoulac have known this Loupiac, who was a spy like himself, and who belonged to the political police? It is quite possible that he may be occupying this house now that his estimable colleague has disappeared."

"Why not, indeed? That supposition makes me feel all the more certain that it was really Trimoulac whom I followed without

seeing his face," said Lucien. "By the way, one thing that has always surprised me is that the murder of that wretched chevalier never led to any prosecution."

"You forget that no one has ever known that he was executed. Fouché and his gang undoubtedly believe that Chevalier de Loupiac has left for foreign parts, and possibly they are waiting for him. They will wait a long time. Oh! that was indeed a skilful stroke on the part of the Grand Mason."

"Too skilful," retorted Lucien. "I can never think of it without a shudder. You knew this Loupiac, did you not?"

"I? Not at all, and he did not know me, I believe. Besides, I thought I told you," added Machefer, "all that I knew respecting this man when we were over there by the Buttes."

"You said that he had become a mason under the name of Mulot, I believe; and that he had seen almost all of us at the meetings he attended."

"Oh! then I did not explain myself very clearly, or you did not understand me. On the contrary, this man fortunately never had anything to do with any of our friends, excepting a few of them; had he known us we should have been denounced like many others whom he caused to be arrested. It is true that he did not have time to effect his purpose. The only one of us who knows him well enough to recognise him anywhere is the Grand Mason himself."

"I, myself, have never seen the Grand Mason's face," muttered Lucien. "Upon my word, ours is a strange association, indeed!"

"This mystery must exist when people conspire," replied Machefer, with a shrug of the shoulders. "I do not know our chief's face any better than you do, and I shall probably never know it, for the society seems to me to be entirely broken up."

"So much the better!" was Lucien's reply. "I have never cared to belong to it since that dreadful night. Heaven forbid that we should ever have to repent of having been present at that affair, for Maxime Trimoulac may be following in the footsteps of the other spy, the Chevalier de Loupiac."

"That is what I fear," said Machefer, promptly, "and the more so as this house, this No. 13, I now remember, cannot be the place where the chevalier lived. In fact, it was merely a kind of meeting-house where he met subordinate spies and arranged his infamous plans. This fellow Trimoulac evidently uses it for similar purposes; but it matters little now. My plans are made. You must go away to-night. Frantz will give you the clothes of one of my clerks, and you must go out through the shop. He will take you to the house of a sister of his, who lives near Charonne. When you are once in safety, and I no longer have any cause to feel anxious about you, I will search for Virginie. The great point is to find out where she went on reaching Paris."

"Could she have gone to No. 13 Chaussée de Clignancourt?" suggested Lucien.

"What an idea ! If Trimoulac wrote the false letter he would have taken good care not to ask her to go to the mean mouse-trap where that Chevalier de Loupiac was then in the habit of resorting. The matter of the will was one that concerned him personally, and he evidently would not have cared to bring the police into it."

"I think that you are right," responded Lucien, "and——"

At this moment, however, three knocks, between each of which there was a short interval, were heard at the door.

Both Machefer and Lucien started, and looked anxiously at one another.

"That is the usual announcement of a message from the Grand Mason," said Machefer to his friend, in a low tone.

"He has chosen a bad time," muttered Lucien, who was annoyed by this interruption.

"Well, I shall open the door," rejoined the provision dealer. "We shall know what it's, and act accordingly."

He thereupon rose up and went to the portal, which he had carefully bolted on entering the room. When the door opened Lucien's surprise was great indeed to see M. Vernède on the threshold.

"What, is it you, Thomas ?" exclaimed Machefer. "Did you know that I had returned, then ?"

"No ; but I hoped that you had, as what I have to tell you is so urgent and so serious." And then, turning to Lucien, the banker added :

"I did not expect to find you here, my friend."

"I went away this morning, as I told you I should do, but I have returned on account of some very peculiar occurrences——"

"Which you must relate some other time. Let Thomas speak," interrupted Machefer ; "he did not come for nothing."

"No ; for our lives are in danger. The masons have been denounced."

"The masons ?" exclaimed Lucien, in amazement.

"Yes, my dear Bellefond," resumed M. Vernède, "the masons, to whom I belong as well as you and Machefer. I did not tell you before that I belonged to the association."

"I have never seen you at any of its meetings, certainly——"

"That may be ; however, my friend, I have no reason for hiding this secret from you any longer, and you may remain and hear all that I have to say to Machefer."

"What is it ?" asked the purveyor, who was both anxious and impatient.

"The Chevalier de Loupiac is alive," was the banker's solemn response.

"Loupiac ?" exclaimed Lucien and Machefer in one breath. Their amazement was great indeed.

"Yes ; Loupiac the traitor, who has betrayed us all, the man whom we arrested, tried, and condemned to death."

"Impossible! Are you mad?" demanded Machefer, clutching the banker's arm.

"No. I have seen him as plainly as I now see you."

"When, pray?"

"Not an hour ago."

"Where?"

"On the Pont-Neuf, at the entrance of the Place Dauphine. He was talking to the driver of a coach from which he had just alighted."

"A driver!" exclaimed young Bellefond, excitedly, struck by a sudden thought.

"Yes; and the coach waited for him on the Quai des Orfèvres, while he—the knave—slipped stealthily into the Rue de Jerusalem."

"What does this Chevalier de Loupiac look like? You know that I have never seen him," said Machefer.

"Well, he wore a black wig to-day and waxed moustaches, and no one but I could have recognised him."

"A black wig—waxed moustaches!" gasped the purveyor. "Oh! then—but, yes—it's the very same man!"

"What do you mean?"

"Why the man who travelled with me in the coach to Périgueux, of course."

"The one whom you called Gardilan in your first letter?"

"Exactly; and do you know who this Gardilan really is? Why, he is Maxime Trimoulac, the heir-at-law of Colonel Lacaussade, and his nephew; and if we do not find the missing will, why, he will inherit the property."

"How do you know that it is the same man that I just met?" asked Vernède, puzzled.

"Had not the driver of the coach a yellow coat, with several capes," demanded Lucien, eagerly.

"Yes, like most coachmen."

"Was the number of the hack 1669?" resumed the young fellow.

"Yes," replied the banker.

"I knew it!" then exclaimed Lucien. "So Trimoulac and the Chevalier de Loupiac are one and the same."

"That is evident, and you see that Loupiac is still alive," replied Thomas Vernède.

"But, if he is alive, an innocent man was put to death in his place?" urged Bellefond.

"That seems unfortunately to be true," murmured Machefer.

"Ah! I was right," said Lucien, indignantly, "when I declared that the pretended justice of the Grand Mason was but an abominable act of murder!"

Thomas Vernède started, and then drew himself up to his full height. Finally, going towards his daughter's affianced lover, he seized him by the arm, and said quietly: "I am the Grand Mason!"

"You!" exclaimed the young man, who had turned very pale, and seemed as if about to faint.

"Yes, I!" said Vernède, proudly, "and I give you back your promise, my friend. You must shrink from entering the family of a man who ordered an abominable murder. You are free."

"Forgive me!" stammered Lucien.

"Come, Thomas, you must overlook idle words. We have something else to attend to besides reproaching one another," said Machefer.

"You are right, let us remain friends," said the banker, holding out his hand to Lucien, who took it eagerly. "Concord was never more necessary between us, as we have a terrible task ahead, and I must know all. Did this Trimoulac return from Périgueux at the same time as yourself?"

"He came back before I did. He must have reached Paris last night, whereas I only arrived just now."

"Does he know that you are here?"

"He left me in the Rue du Jour, in front of my own door. We said that we should see each other again."

"He saw Lucien, then?"

"He had passed an hour with him in a coach, owing to a very strange meeting, which I will tell you about. Lucien must leave this house to-night."

"It will be too late then. Lucien must go at once," said Vernède.

"But you are both of you in as much danger as I am," observed the young fellow.

"No; it is you alone whom this man wishes to injure, for he does not know me, although I know him so well; he does not dream that I am the Grand Mason."

"He has no interest in acting against me," added Machefer, "for he never saw me except in Périgord, where we were very good friends."

"You see, my dear Lucien," said the banker, "that you are the only one about whom we need trouble ourselves."

"I have found a place for him at Charonne with Frantz's sister," rejoined the provision dealer, "and when it is dark he can go out through the shop."

"It will be better for him to go now. If that miserable spy be really the colonel's heir, as no doubt he is, he will be anxious to rid himself at once of such a dangerous opponent as Lucien, and he has no doubt gone to obtain a warrant against our friend under some pretext or other."

"He has a very good pretext at hand if he is the Chevalier de Loupiac who betrayed the masons once before. But I cannot get over it, I cannot believe in this resurrection, for it is one. A man who was walled in a pillar——"

"Oh! he was not walled up," interrupted the banker.

"Of course not, for if he had been walled up in flesh and blood,

he could not have got out. There must be some mistake. But then, who was punished in his place?"

Vernède was trying to find some answer to this question, as great a puzzle as the riddles of the Sphinx, when hurried footsteps were heard on the stairs.

Machefer ran to the door, which he had neglected to bolt again when his friend the banker entered; but he was too late, and the precaution would have served no purpose.

The door opened, and a commissary of police, wearing his scarf of office, appeared at the door, followed by four gendarmes, who stopped upon the landing.

"We are caught," muttered Machefer, who was striving to appear calm.

However, to his great astonishment, the commissary pushed the door to, behind him, leaving the men outside, and then in the politest tone imaginable, inquired: "Which of you gentlemen is named Bellefond?"

"It is I, sir," replied Lucien, promptly.

"Were you recently a lieutenant in the 25th Regiment of the Line?"

"I was."

"Then you must follow me at once. I am the bearer of a warrant for your arrest."

"Very well," replied the young fellow. "May I inquire, however, what charge is brought against me?"

"I have no reason for hiding from you the fact that you are called upon to account for the death of a foreign officer, who was found dead in a hired coach during the month of July last."

Lucien drew a long breath, while Vernède and Machefer exchanged glances of surprise.

They had expected an accusation of conspiracy which would have included all of them; but this was only a charge of murder or manslaughter, of which Lucien could easily clear himself. They could scarcely believe in their good fortune.

The commissary, however, now set them still more at their ease by saying:

"I know, gentlemen, that I am in the house of an honourable merchant, who, being the friend of Monsieur Lucien Bellefond, could not do otherwise than shelter him. The king's government does not wish to annoy any quiet person, and I can assure you that no one will be troubled on account of this matter, which will perhaps be cleared up satisfactorily. Indeed, I hope that it will have no serious results," he added, turning to Lucien.

"I will follow you, sir," said the young man, who contented himself with pressing his friends' hands, and whispering in the banker's ear, as he passed by: "Do not tell her that I have been arrested."

Vernède understood that he alluded to Thérèse, and gave him a significant glance, while he placed himself beside the gendarmes.

XIII.

IN the early days of September, after a long, dull month, the house in the Rue d'Enfer had suddenly assumed a look of gaiety that excited a great deal of remark in the neighbourhood.

The front shutters, which had been closed for several weeks, were now again open, and the majestic person of Madame Boutard had appeared several times at the window. She seemed to be on the look-out for some one, to be impatiently awaiting an arrival. It was also remarked that the Bourdaches were constantly going and coming, and that a somewhat mean-looking individual, who had never been seen before, had made his appearance in the house.

M. Bonnin had but few neighbours, still he had some, and they took an interest in what went on at his house. They were ignorant, however, of the great event that had upset the whole establishment, for none of them had ever entered the place.

The master of the house had returned the previous evening from his adventurous journey, and had stayed there all night, contrary to his usual custom. It may easily be believed that he was warmly received by Clarisse, who was dying of love, impatience, and weariness, and also by the governess, who had had a great deal of trouble to keep the young beauty within bounds.

Bonnin was petted and feasted and questioned as to the result of his journey, but he proved very reserved.

He certainly confessed that he had not brought back the Golden Fleece; but he took good care not to discourage his dear daughter, for he told her that he believed that he would soon bring matters to a happy conclusion.

He even went so far as to promise her that she should soon see the young officer again, and that this time Lucien would not be disposed to fly off when a mutually advantageous marriage was suggested to him.

The interview which Saint-Privat *alias* Bonnin had with the fair Julie was longer and more serious. He had not written to her since the 17th of August, and had told her nothing satisfactory on that occasion. He thus now had a great deal to relate, and the ex-belle of the Directory expected to hear all about the whole affair. She was somewhat disappointed, however, for the old man contented himself with stating that he had the necessary clues to the whole matter, one being at Périgueux, and the other in Paris, and that he was sure that Zenobia had confided the will to a woman—a woman,

he added, whom he was confident he would be able to find, though to do so, he must, first of all, confer with his agent Cornillon.

Bourdache, who was sent to fetch the spy, had a great deal of trouble to find him, and it was not until the afternoon that he made his appearance. He met his master in the garden where Lucien had sat so often during his convalescence, and where Saint-Privat found himself so snug—far from all who could overhear.

The master was pleasant and familiar, and the subordinate deferential; and after a hasty exchange of compliments, they began to talk business.

"What did you find out during my absence?" inquired Clarisse's father.

"A great many things concerning the man who followed you in the gardens of the Palais-Royal on the day when——"

"Yes, I know; but you are not aware that I have recently been travelling with him."

"Where?"

"Why, I went with him to Périgord, of course," replied Saint-Privat.

"Then that is why he has not been seen in Paris for a month past," remarked Cornillon.

"Exactly. He has been trying all this time to thwart me with regard to the will, and I now know why he went to ask for Zenobia Capitaine's letters. I now only need some information as regards the life he leads here, and the places where he lodges. I say places, for he must have more abodes than one, the rascal!"

"Oh, he has several residences, as you will see. But to my story. In the first place, Number 15 and Number 33 had told me the truth. Our man belongs to the political brigade, and is working under Fouché's immediate control. He naturally sports several names; but he is best known by that of Loupiac."

"That isn't his real name, as I now know," interrupted Saint-Privat.

"That may be, master. However, in Rovigo's time he went on a mission to Spain. Once there he went over to Wellington, and then to the Bourbons, whom he secretly served all the while. He is now in high favour at the 'house,' and it is said that it was he who caught Labédoyère."

"That is not true," interrupted Saint-Privat. "He was down there in Périgord with me at the very time when the colonel was arrested, but no matter. Come to the question of his lodgings—that interests me the most."

"And that is what gave me the most trouble. However, in the first place, he has a very handsome set of rooms in the Rue Neuvedes-Petits Champs. He goes there but seldom, however, and only when he has to receive some one and make a great display. He never sleeps there at all. His real abode is in the Rue de la Grange-Batelière, at Number 16, where he's very thick with a certain

baroness, a very handsome woman, known to the whole neighbourhood, and, in fact, to all Paris, as Zoé de Sainte-Gauburge. She's his mistress."

"Good! he must have gone there on his arrival, then?" exclaimed the ex-director of the dark room.

"Very likely," replied Cornillon. "But it is not easy, so I hear, to see him when he is there."

"I will undertake to do so. However, go on!"

"He also has a kind of hiding-place in the suburbs, and not far from the city gate."

"Where is it?"

"On the Chaussée de Clignancourt, Number 13. It is a little pavilion standing between a court and garden, and it's very pretty, upon my word!"

"He goes there to amuse himself, no doubt."

"No; I think, on the contrary, that he goes there for business purposes."

"What makes you think so?"

"Oh! a strange story that Number 33 told me a few days ago—one of the men, you know, who gave me the first information about him."

"Tell me what he said."

"Well, then, it seems that one night, about two months ago, Number 33 was sent to take an order to Chevalier de Loupiac at the place I've just mentioned, in the Chaussée de Clignancourt. Fouché gave him the mission, for although he was not minister at the time, he was not far from it, and my friend Number 33, who had served under him before, offered to do this job for him."

"Never mind the details. For heaven's sake, come to the point!" said Saint Privat, impatiently.

"I must enter into particulars, so that you may understand the matter better. It seems that the Chevalier de Loupiac had been to Gonesse, to the headquarters of the English army, and that he was to bring back Wellington's reply to the people who were managing the capitulation. Number 33 had been told to go to the pavilion, and wait there for the chevalier until he saw him."

"Did he find him?" asked Saint-Privat, somewhat impatiently.

"No, and this is the strange part of the story. Number 33 had a key of the gate, and knew the place. He got there at nine, and at once went round the house. The room where he expected to find Loupiac was at the back, on the ground floor. He saw a light there, and, as he is naturally cautious, he went up softly to see whether Loupiac was alone or not. What did he see, however, but a young man of the chevalier's height, but not the chevalier himself. This young man was walking up and down the room. He was about as tall as Loupiac, but more slender. This seemed strange to my friend, and he looked again. Well, the young man seated himself at a table and began to write; so Number 33 determined to wait till

Loupiac appeared, as his errand was with him, and with nobody else. He hid himself in the garden behind a big tree, and waited. He had not been there five minutes when he heard some one walking softly on the gravel-walk. He held his breath and stared with all his might."

"Well, what did he see?" asked the old man, who was beginning to be interested by this curious story.

"Oh! Four or five men came stealthily in. My comrade took care not to stir, and it was well for him that he didn't move. The new-comers began to look through the window, then they pushed open the door, and all at once they sprung upon the man at the table."

"Did they kill him?" eagerly asked the ex-director of the dark room, peaceable though he was.

"That is just what Number 33 could not see, as they began by upsetting the lights, and the rest of the work was done in the dark. However, he saw them go out ten minutes after, carrying the young man's body with them. They had him in a sack. As you may naturally suppose, Number 33 did not venture to run after the rascals, who would certainly have killed him if he had."

While listening to the end of this story, Saint-Privat had shown signs of uneasiness, and now that it was finished, he fell into deep thought.

"Can you tell me the exact date of this occurrence?" said he, at last.

"No, for I was not there," replied Cornillon, "but Number 33 said that it was on a Sunday, a day or two before the capitulation of Paris."

"Then it must have been Sunday, July the 2nd, and that letter was dated the 28th of June," muttered the old man to himself.

"That may be," replied Cornillon, who had caught what Saint-Privat said.

"But, let me see," resumed Clarisse's father, "how was the young man in question dressed, and what was his general appearance?"

"He was not very tall, as I have already told you; he had rather long black hair, a small waist, and narrow shoulders. He wore a travelling suit, a cloak with a cape, top-boots, and a broad-brimmed hat."

"Didn't your friend hear him say anything when these men pounced upon him?"

"Oh! he hadn't time to speak, it appears. They threw themselves upon him suddenly, and Number 33 thinks that they began by gagging him. He only saw that the poor devil had laid two pistols upon the table, and that the fellow who seemed to be the leader of the band put the weapons in his pocket."

"What did Number 33 do when the gang had gone?"

"He kept quiet for about an hour or so, to see whether Loupiac would come, and as he did not, he went away."

"To report to Fouché, I suppose?"

"Yes, but he did not find him at his house on the Quai Malaquais. The duke was in conference with the marshals who were intrusted with the defence of Paris. On the following day he was still unable to see him ; in fact, all the important people were so busy. On the day after that the capitulation took place, and everybody in the police force expected to be discharged. Nobody knew which way to turn. Bonaparte, the Bourbons, and the Emperor Alexander, all had to be dealt with, and not a man was sure of his berth. My friend Number 33, who had plenty of prudence, did not say anything, and it was all the better for him."

"But didn't Fouché ask for his report ?"

"No, the duke was only thinking of how he could manage to get appointed minister."

"But Number 33 kept his place ?"

"Yes, like all the rest. Folks know very well at the palace that it is not so easy to get an efficient police force together. They kept everybody, and they did right. I have been told that some one advised Louis XVIII. to sleep in Bonaparte's bed, and he did so."

"His Majesty is a sensible man, there's no denying it," said Saint-Privat, gravely. "But tell me, Number 33's reserve did not prevent him from talking to an old comrade, I see ; and indeed on the first occasion, when you asked him about our man, he ought to have told you all he knew, instead of telling you only part. Why did he keep such a lot back till later on ?"

"Prudence, sir ; it was prudence that restrained him. The first time I questioned him he did not know how the chevalier would stand with the new government, whereas he guessed that you were out of work. Put yourself in his place. He has no private means, and he is the father of a family. All that we could expect of him was that he wouldn't lie to us, and he hasn't lied. He says that Loupiac belongs to the political brigade, and that we had better be on our guard. That is as much as we could expect."

"Then why did he give you these additional particulars lately ?"

"Oh ! things have changed. The 'house' is reorganised. There is no further overthrow to be feared. The Duke of Otranto is minister, and he has no scruples. He knows that police agents have no opinions, and don't need them any more than a cook needs gloves. He simply asks the agents to work conscientiously, and that is all. That is why my friend is so easy now. He knows that he won't be troubled about the past, and that is why he has been so confidential after proving so close at first."

"Then he told you all that happened at the Chaussée Clignancourt without your pressing him ?" asked Saint-Privat.

"No ; on the contrary, I had to question him closely. I should not perhaps have succeeded if he hadn't known that Loupiac was going to leave the 'house.' It is said that Loupiac has made a fortune, and that he is going to bid farewell to Fouché and the whole business. He has not been seen among us for two months past."

"Yes, I do not believe that he will stay in the service any longer. But there is one thing that I have a great interest in clearing up. Did your friend carry his discretion so far as not to tell this story to Loupiac himself ?"

"Of course ! and he had no great merit in keeping it secret, for the chevalier has not appeared at the 'house' lately. Number 33 has only heard of him through me, and that was when I told him about his following you and being at the post-office. Then, when he knew the truth, and could have told him about the affair of that Sunday night, why, Loupiac had suddenly disappeared again. Our friend Number 33 had heard that he had gone on a journey, so that he would have to wait to speak to him."

"Then the chevalier doesn't know anything ?"

"No, probably not, unless Number 33 has found a means of meeting him, which must have been since yesterday."

"Where could he have seen him ?" said Saint-Privat, pondering all the while.

"I don't know, but I can tell you that he has watched for him, and knows his habits well. It was Number 33 who told me about all the various abodes in the Rue-Neuve-des-Petits-Champs and the Rue de la Grange-Batelière."

"Then you think that——"

"I think that Number 33 must have heard of Loupiac's arrival and hastened to see him. He knows that the chevalier is rich, and hopes to be well paid for his information."

Saint-Privat said no more, but began to walk up and down, without noticing Cornillon any further.

He had been enlightened in various ways by what the police-agent had told him.

During the last few days, in Périgord, he had by no means lost his time. Realising that he had been going on the wrong track, as Zenobia did not know how to read or write, and that his own voluntary imprisonment could lead to nothing, he had changed his plans.

He had made use of the time remaining to him when he was set at liberty to collect all the information that he could obtain with regard to the sutler-woman's family, and had concluded that she had sent some one in her place to look for Lucien Bellefond. Moreover, he had finally discovered that this messenger must be a certain niece of Zenobia's, of whose existence and departure from Périgueux he heard from twenty different people.

On this certain basis the ingenious Saint-Privat had built up various conjectures, one of which had a deal of probability about it.

He remembered, for instance, that when making his first inquiries as to the travellers who had arrived in Paris from Périgord at the beginning of July, he had heard that a young man had got into the mail-coach at a stage beyond Périgueux, and had told the courier that he was going to Belgium to look for his father, an officer, who had been wounded at Mont Saint-Jean.

Recollecting this, Saint-Privat now thought that this young fellow might have been Zenobia's niece in a disguise which she had assumed to throw those who were likely to annoy her off the track. In order to make certain on this point, he interviewed all the mail-coach couriers, and as, when they passed through Périgueux, they all stopped at the hotel where he was staying, he was able to ply his questions, and finally learnt from one of them that the young man in question, who had had no baggage with him, had left the coach at Villejuif and gone on afoot into Paris. This was a more significant clue than any of the rest.

The indefatigable Saint-Privat did not stop at this, however. By dint of inquiring in all directions, and talking with maids and bootblacks at the various hotels in Périgueux, he found out that Zenobia's niece had gone off in consequence of receiving a letter from Paris. Thereupon he unhesitatingly concluded, with the aptitude of a detective, that this letter had been written in Lucien Bellefond's name.

A fortunate chance finally revealed to him that Gardilan, his odious persecutor, was none other than Maxime Trimoulac, the colonel's heir-at-law.

The decisive clue was now found. It was evident that Trimoulac had written a false letter, and that the niece, caught by the snare, had started off to meet him. It was also evident that she had not seen him, since he had since been obliged to go disguised to Périgueux.

The solution of the problem could now only be found in Paris, and Saint-Privat started for the capital without troubling himself about his new acquaintance, the truffle-seller.

He wished to outstrip Maxime Trimoulac, who had packed up and absconded; and he (Saint-Privat) had returned to the Rue d'Enfer, anxious to learn from Cornillon the result of the inquiries which he had told him to make in his absence.

This result was now made known to him.

Cornillon's report acquainted him with more than he had expected to learn as to the adventures of Zenobia's niece on her arrival in Paris, and a great advantage in all this was that he now, perhaps, knew more about her than did Maxime Trimoulac himself.

Saint-Privat, with his sagacious mind, did not hesitate to conclude, from what Cornillon had told him, that the said niece had been led by the false letter to repair to the little house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt, and that she had there unfortunately fallen into the hands of people who were Trimoulac's enemies, and who had seized upon her in his place, no doubt mistaking her identity on account of her attire. Everything made this seem probable—the date of the occurrence, the attire, and the general appearance of the individual upon whom the unknown men had pounced.

Now what had become of this individual, this seeming man? He had evidently been harshly handled, but had he been killed or

merely hidden away? Nothing was known on that point. They were only acquainted with the kidnapping. Cornillon, when closely questioned, declared that his friend knew nothing more.

Now, it was evident that the victim of the attempt, wherever she might be, had the colonel's will about her. The only thing, then, was to find her, dead or alive. This was the problem that Saint-Privat was trying to solve as he walked hastily up and down the gravel-walk.

Cornillon scratched his nose with the air of a philosopher as he watched his employer walking to and fro like a madman, and this unaccustomed air of agitation in so quiet a man greatly astonished him.

But there were abundant reasons for agitation, however, for Saint-Privat was asking himself whether he had not better make up his mind to sacrifice a part of his expectations by coming to an agreement with his antagonist.

This antagonist was not Lucien, who seemed to be out of the running on account of the course which events had taken, but Maxime Trimoulac, who was the only man interested in suppressing the colonel's will, just as Lucien was the only man interested in producing that document.

Now, Maxime Trimoulac, who had gone to Périgueux under a false name, had not amused himself with confiding in Bouin, whom he had met on his way. But Bonnin, that is to say, Saint-Privat, supposed very reasonably that the said Trimoulac had not been discouraged by his first failure, and had not remained inactive during his sojourn in Zenobia Capitaine's native town.

He must have found out, for instance, all that he, Saint-Privat, had ascertained respecting Zenobia's niece. It was even likely that he had found out all about her starting for Paris.

Accordingly, there were now but two courses open to the fond father of the statuesque Clarisse. He must be more rapid than his rival in finding the woman who held the will, or he must treat with that rival himself.

The first plan would have suited him the best. His arrangements with Lucien Bellefond were all complete. He knew that the lieutenant would keep his word under any circumstances, and pay him the million, supposing he received the will from his hands.

There was no difficulty whatever as to the upshot of the negotiations with Lucien, at least so far as the latter personally was concerned; and Saint-Privat, like all such cunning men, liked above all to treat with upright persons, for scoundrels especially set store by honesty in business relations with others.

However, this plan was far from being the easier of the two. The track of Zenobia's niece, after being miraculously followed up to the little house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt, was now lost, and Saint-Privat, think as he might, could not hit upon any scheme that would enable him to recover the clue.

Moreover, Cornillon was no more competent than himself in that respect, and Number 33 had certainly not seen more than he had related.

One man alone might be able to tell the end of the story, and that man was Maxime Trimoulac. He alone knew what enemies he had, what they were capable of doing to harm him, and what they might have done with the young girl whom they had so unscrupulously seized upon in the belief that they had captured the so-called Chevalier de Loupiac in person.

At the same time, Saint-Privat was inclined to believe that he could come to an understanding with Trimoulac. On one condition, however, which was that he should see him before Number 33 intervened.

To treat with an enemy, it is necessary to have some advantage to offer him; and in the present case, what Bonnin had to offer was the secret of the kidnapping business on the night of the 2nd of July.

As long as Trimoulac did not know this secret, the ex-director of the dark room could go to him and boldly say :

"We are hunting the same game, and I have a right to ask for a part of the spoils, for I know something which you don't know. I know where Zenobia's niece went when she reached Paris. I do not know where she now is, but with the information I can give you, you will be in a position to help me to find her. Let us come to an agreement. Sign a contract, and I will give you some information of the utmost importance."

However, on the other hand, if Number 33 had already seen Trimoulac, there was nothing to be done. And it was this surmise which distressed Saint-Privat so keenly. The great point was to be the first in the race.

The old scamp had soon come to this conclusion, even weighing the chances of being cheated by Trimoulac, in whom he necessarily had but little confidence. His conclusion, therefore, was, that he must see Trimoulac without a moment's delay.

"Wait for me here," said he to Cornillon; "I have to go out, and on my return I shall need you immediately."

"I am on duty to-day, sir," replied the detective; "but, no matter, it sha'n't be said that I have left my old master in the lurch."

"I shall pay you well, old fellow, and the work that you will have to do for me will bring you in ten times as much as that which you are doing for the 'house.'"

"Then you are suited, sir," asked the agent; "you are pleased with what I have just been telling you?"

"Why, yes and no. At all events, if by any miracle I do not succeed, it will not be any fault of yours. Stay here. Walk about. Smoke your pipe, if you like. Make yourself at home. I will tell Madame Boutard to send you a bottle of Tavel out here in the

garden. I know that is your favourite wine. She will keep you company till I return."

"Ah! sir," said Cornillon, feelingly—the proposal of the bottle of Tavel made his mouth water—"you have such a way about you that no one can refuse anything you ask. I don't know how it is, but I feel as though I could lay down my life for you."

Saint-Privat, however, did not tarry to hear his old assistant's thanks. He hurried off; and on his way out he gave his orders to the faithful Bourdache, telling him to prevent Cornillon from leaving. Then he hastened to a coach-stand on the Place Saint-Michel.

He calculated that the man who called himself Gardilan had arrived in Paris on the night before, and he conjectured that he had gone straight to the residence of the so-called Baroness de Sainte-Gauburge, whose address Cornillon had stated.

The day was far advanced, and any one but Trimoulac would have had abundant time to set to business after a month's absence. However, Saint-Privat had had an opportunity to study his behaviour and habits in Périgucux, and he knew right well that M. Maxime took his ease as to his duties. He was one of the most cunning and skilful, but also the most sensual and lazy of all Fouché's spies.

So, although it was three o'clock in the afternoon, there was a chance of finding him still breakfasting at his ease, beside the captivating baroness.

Excited by the hope of obtaining a dowry for his dear daughter, Clarisse's aged parent was in great haste to treat with this competitor, so worthy of him, and, after engaging a coach, he bade the driver go as fast as possible.

Twenty minutes after leaving the Rue d'Enfer, he alighted before a handsome new house, and realised by its appearance that M. Trimoulac had not fixed his affections upon any mere grisette.

He naturally asked for the Baroness de Sainte-Gauburge, being well aware that he would be shown out if he undertook to mention any one of the false names assumed by Lacaussade's nephew.

A handsome suite on the second floor was pointed out to him, and, on addressing the smart chambermaid who appeared at the door of the flat, he took good care not to mention Fouché's name by way of introduction. He merely told the maid that he had come from Périgucux with important news for the master of the house, without mentioning that gentleman's name.

This cool way of proceeding proved successful. The girl had nothing to say in objection, but begged him to wait a moment, and presently returned saying that her master was ready to receive the messenger from Périgord.

The die was cast. The two will-seekers were now about to meet openly.

Saint-Privat, delighted by the success of his trick, though somewhat disturbed by the prospect of the decisive interview, followed

the maid, who led him to a small room which was luxuriously, rather than elegantly, furnished. She left him alone there, and he now had time to think of what he should say to his adversary.

Never did a diplomatist need more cunning to treat a delicate question of international policy, and the ex-director of the dark room mentally summoned to his aid all the skill of Talleyrand, whom he venerated, and who at that moment was discussing the interests of France at the Congress of Vienna.

There were two shoals to avoid—too much reserve, which might put the man whose confidence he wished to gain upon his guard; and too much openness, lest he should at once obtain an advantage, by which he would not fail to profit, if that were possible. In a word, the secret of Virginie Lasbaysses's kidnapping must be carefully handled.

While Saint-Privat was preparing his opening words, the door quietly opened, and the so-called Gardilan's waxed moustaches appeared between the scarlet silk hangings.

"I thought so!" exclaimed a mocking voice. "A messenger from Périgueux, that was what Rosette said. I told her that he must have gold spectacles. You see I am right. Come in, sir, come in!"

Bonnin had, indeed, put on his spectacles, as he usually did on great occasions, just as a warrior arms himself for battle.

He willingly followed the individual who so pleasantly received him, and entered a boudoir, where there was a table bearing two cups of hot Mocha coffee, served in Sèvres china.

A row of all sorts of cordials, in flasks of various colours, also stood there, showing that Gardilan had indeed been breakfasting with the Baroness de Sainte-Gauburge.

Saint-Privat thought that she might even be somewhere within hearing, and he began by apologising: "My dear travelling companion—allow me so to call you," he commenced.

"Of course you may do so, as we passed three whole days boxed up together in the same coach," replied the so-called Gardilan.

"I am afraid that I have disturbed you," added the ex-director of the dark room.

"Oh, dear no!"

"But I fancied you were not alone."

"Oh! there was only Zoé here. She is a friend of mine, and you don't disturb me. You have come on business, I can detect that by the way you peer over the tops of your spectacles. Well, we will talk seriously, my worthy sir, as seriously as possible, I promise you, but first of all you must take a little cordial. Which will you have? Rum, Rosolio, Maraschino, or Vespetro?"

"Nothing, thank you, nothing! I never take anything of the kind," answered Saint-Privat, promptly.

"So you do not like sweet drinks. Well, I will give you some old brandy, the very thing for the brave, for you are a brave man, Monsieur Bonnin."

"Ta nks."

"Swallow this, and see if you like it."

Clarisse's father, somewhat surprised by these preliminaries, thought it best, however, to do as his host desired, and made up his mind to taste the drink which Gardilan described as fit tipples for the brave. He, no doubt, was familiar with the old saying: "Claret for boys, port for men, and brandy for heroes."

The ex-director of the dark room, by the way, never did anything without a motive. He saw that his adversary had been taking a little too much at the copious repast provided by Madame de Sainte-Gauburge, and he was willing to help him still further along the same road. He had seen him at table in Périgueux, and knew that his tongue usually wagged fast enough at dessert.

"Well and good!" resumed the amiable traveller. "I see that you are not one of those who are afraid of a glass of brandy; I used to think down there that you knew what good living was, and, indeed, I should have cultivated your acquaintance more if I had thought that we should meet again in Paris. And, by-the-by, my dear sir, tell me how you found out that I was here in the abode of Madame de Sainte-Gauburge, my friend, the descendant of an old Norman family."

This was a direct and unforeseen thrust, and Saint-Privat now saw that Trimoulac was not so intoxicated as he looked. He resolved to reply in such a way as to parry the thrust, for he saw that it was necessary to do so, and he thought it best to go direct to his aim.

"I learned your address," said he, "through one of my friends, who belongs to the police of the realm."

"Ah! ah!" replied Trimoulac, in a tone which spoke volumes.

"Yes, it was so. He has not the honour of knowing you personally, but he has often heard your name mentioned at the 'house,' where you hold a very high position."

"At the 'house'—that is the correct word, and you could not speak better," said Trimoulac, who kept himself on the defensive.

"I hasten to add that this same friend of mine has the greatest admiration for you and your talents," replied Saint-Privat, with a courteous bow.

"I am very much obliged to him. He is certainly a man of taste. But may I ask what reason you had for asking my address?"

"I will tell you, my dear sir, without any preamble, and you will see that I deal openly with you."

"Openly? So much the better! Yes, indeed, that is my own way, especially with smart men like you. So tell me what you desire, as you came here with the obliging intention of so doing."

"I will, indeed, my dear Monsieur Trimoulac," responded the ex-director of the dark room.

"Trimoulac? Good! I see that you did not lose your time down there in Périgord, as you have learned that my name is Trimoulac."

"I had no great merit in making the discovery, for country people are so talkative. And, besides, the nephew of the late Monsieur Lacaussade left a record behind him, although he was so young when he went away."

"Upon my word, now, I shall not attempt to deny it, and I presume that you have already guessed what I went there for."

"I venture to think that I have," said Saint-Privat, with a barely perceptible chuckle. "You went there to talk with a woman named Zenobia Capitaine, whom you suspect of having a will of your uncle's making, and you wished to get it from her, as it disinherits you."

"Better and better!" exclaimed Trimoulac, with a smile. "There's no hiding anything from you; however, my dear friend, just allow me to ask you a question."

"Ten, if you like."

"Good! Another glass to help you to make the answer clear."

"No need of that, sir. My answer will be as clear as crystal," said Saint-Privat, smiling at his own wit.

"I do not doubt it, but I beg of you to take another glass with me. Come, come, accept! If you refuse, I shall not believe in your frankness."

"No matter, I will drink another glass, since you so particularly desire it. There!" and Saint-Privat imbibed another nip of brandy.

"Now I am waiting for your question," he added.

"It is a very simple one. I wish to know what you have to do with Zenobia yourself; for, as you may well believe, I know that you went to prison of your own accord. You had yourself arrested, my dear sir, in order to make the sutler's acquaintance. It was not a bad idea, though not a new one, by any means."

"You may as well say that it was a very old one, and, in fact, I never supposed that so able a man as you would be taken in by it. However, it came near succeeding, and if you had not arrived and disturbed me in the court-yard——"

"You confess, then, that you were trying to get round our agreeable friend, Zenobia?"

"I do."

"With what object, pray?"

"To induce her to give me the will that disinherits you," frankly answered the ex-director of the dark room.

"What do you wish to do with it?"

"I'll wager that you can guess."

"That may be," replied Trimoulac; "but I should be glad to hear it from your own lips, my dear sir, and as you are so frank——"

"Well," said Saint-Privat, "I wish to sell it to the person whom it concerns—Monsieur Lucien Bellefond, formerly a lieutenant in the 25th Regiment of the Line, and your uncle's sole heir by this will."

"Very good! We were competitors for this inheritance, I see—I on my own account, and you on that of another person."

"And we are still competitors, my dear sir."

"That may be," growled Trimoulac, frowning slightly. "But in spite of your frankness, my dear travelling companion, a frankness which I admire, I do not very clearly see the aim of your visit to me."

"I wish to inquire whether you are for peace or war," replied Saint-Privat, gravely.

"That is to say, you have come to propose that we shall search for my uncle's will together? Is that your idea?"

"Exactly."

"A will which disinherits me?"

"Oh! entirely."

"Have you read it?"

"No, but I know what it contains."

"You must admit, then, my dear sir, that I have no interest whatever in finding it."

"That is true enough, but on the other hand you have every interest in preventing any other man from finding it."

"Especially if he were disposed to sell it to Monsieur Lucien Bellefond. Eh?"

"That is cleverly reasoned, upon my word."

"Very well, but pray be kind enough to explain to me how you and I, pursuing an opposite aim, can possibly come to an understanding."

"Why, nothing can be more simple. I have no preference, and if I have a reasonable commission I do not care whether I treat with you or with the heir chosen by the colonel."

"This noble indifference does not surprise me on your part," said Maxime Trimoulac; "but as you call this business, tell me, I beg, on what basis does it rest?"

"On what basis?"

"Yes, I wish to know that before replying. One of two things: either I shall make haste to destroy the will, or, on the contrary, you will find it and give it to my rival on being paid for it. There is no room for any bargain in all this, it seems to me."

"I will show you that there is."

"In other words, what have you come to sell me?"

"The will, of course."

"Then you have got the precious document?" said Trimoulac, with unfeigned eagerness.

"Good! he knows nothing," thought Saint-Privat to himself. And then, desirous of profiting by this mistake, the first one that his adversary had made since the commencement of the interview, he quietly replied:

"I will tell you where it is when we have made our bargain."

Trimoulac swallowed a large glass of rum by way of giving himself time to think.

"My dear sir," said he, as he set his glass noisily on the table,

"I appreciate the frankness of your language, and I do not reject the idea of a bargain straight off without examining it; but before concluding one, you must admit that a very great deal remains to be explained by you. You have told me frankly, I admit, how you ascertained my name and address, you have also explained frankly what you have come here for, but there are things which I do not know, and should like to find out. For example, your real name, for, as you must be well aware, I do not believe your story that you are a Monsieur Bonnin, and that you want to Périgueux to attend to a lawsuit."

"Your curiosity is quite natural, my dear sir, and I am ready to satisfy it," replied the ex-director of the dark room.

"I should also like to know the circumstances which put you upon the track of the will and of the colonel's heir Bellefond, whom may the devil fly away with!" exclaimed Maxime.

"Nothing could be more reasonable," observed Saint-Privat. "Let me tell you, then, my dear Monsieur Trimoulac, that I formerly had the honour, like yourself, of serving his excellency the Duke of Otranto."

"Bah! then you belonged to the 'house,' too?" said Trimoulac, with considerable surprise. "How is it that I have never had the honour of meeting you there?"

"Oh, when I belonged to it you were in foreign parts," was the old man's response. "But you have perhaps heard my name, Saint-Privat."

"Saint-Privat? Yes, certainly. Wait a moment while I think! Ah! didn't you leave the political brigade under the Empire?"

"Yes, indeed; in 1808 I was called to other duties. But previous to that I was employed for fifteen years under Cochoa, under Rovigo, and under Fouché, and I am a true child of the ring, as the saying goes."

"That is why I have had so much trouble with you for the last two months," said Trimoulac, politely. "Any other man would not have thrown himself in my way three times running, and I sincerely congratulate you, my dear sir. Your make-up as an old soldier was a success."

"Ah! then you remember that little joke?" replied Saint-Privat, pleasantly. "But do you know, my dear colleague, that you tricked me like a schoolboy that day? But for a most miraculous chance, I should have been killed—beaten to death—in the garden of the Tuileries."

"I should have regretted it sincerely, as you may well believe," was Maxime's courteous retort. "But tell me, as we are so confidential now, did you recognise me in the coach on the way to Périgueux?"

"Yes, my dear colleague, I did."

"How?"

"Why, by three little red hairs which you forgot to shave off your

right cheek. You had a dark wig, remember. You see how it was, do you not? There is nothing so treacherous as a mole." And with these words Saint-Privat rubbed his hands gleefully.

"Upon my word, you are right, and I am merely a fool!" exclaimed Trimoulac, putting his hand to his cheek. "We learn something fresh every day, and you are older than I am."

"I'll wager that you recognised me too," now said Saint-Privat with a laugh.

"Oh, yes, indeed! you may be sure of that. I knew you in the morning after breakfast at Orleans."

"I suspected as much, and I must admit that the trick of catching at my glasses was admirably planned and executed."

"Bah! that was a mere nothing," replied Trimoulac. "To tell the truth, I expected something better of the trick that I played you at Limoges when I told the driver that you had gone ahead."

"Ah," muttered Saint-Privat, biting his lips, "then it was to you that I owed that misadventure?"

"Yes," said Trimoulac, modestly. "Well, a man must joke occasionally, you know. But let us return to our subject. You have just told me who you are, and I am disposed to treat you as a colleague, but you have not yet told me how you found out that the will existed, and how you entered into relations with that sweet cousin of mine, Lucien Bellefond."

"I will tell you, my dear Monsieur Trimoulac," replied Saint-Privat, "and in this my frankness will show itself most clearly. I am sure that when you have heard me you will not accuse me of any after-thought. You must know, then, that the functions which I was called upon to fulfil when I left the 'house' during the last years of the Empire enabled me to learn a great many secrets. In point of fact, I was simply the director of the dark room."

"I ought to have guessed it."

"I was dismissed in 1814, but I returned to the same post when Bonaparte came back from the island of Elba, and I kept it till the recent return of the allies."

"I understand now. You must have unscaled a letter from that sutler woman," said Maxime, sagaciously.

"You are right. You see that I keep nothing from you," promptly rejoined Saint-Privat.

"And you at once thought of coming to an understanding with my antagonist. That was not kind, my dear colleague; you ought to have given me the preference," and thereupon Maxime assumed an aggrieved air.

"I did not then know that you were one of us. You had never served under your real name, remember, and it was quite impossible for me to guess that the Chevalier de Loupiac and Maxime Trimoulac were one and the same person."

"Who told you that they were one and the same person?" asked Lucien's cousin, eagerly.

"A man belonging to the 'house,' whom I sometimes employ, the same fellow who gave me your address," answered Saint-Privat.

"He was prowling about the Palais-Royal on the day when I followed you, was he not?" asked the spurious chevalier.

"He was. But he did not tell me about your identity till this morning, when I had occasion to see him."

"And you lost no time in coming here, I see."

"I had none to lose. Lucien Bellefond is warned, and he may get ahead of us," said the ex-director of the dark room.

"I think not," muttered Trimoulac. "However," he resumed aloud, "I know all that I wished to know, and I am ready to hear what more you may have to say. But I must not conceal from you that I know a great deal, and if you have only come to tell me what I already know, I shall decline to bargain with you. My journey to Périgord was not in vain."

"Nor was mine."

"I am willing to believe it, although I am quite sure that Zenobia did not tell you anything of much account."

"Well, in point of fact, she told me nothing at all, but I have made others speak."

"I am listening to you."

Saint-Privat gazed at his friend of the political police with a mocking air, and said laughingly:

"You are playing a cunning part, and I might do the same if I wished. But with this system we should not arrive at anything. I do not perhaps know what you know, but you certainly do not know what I know. If we lose our time in feeling one another's pulse, Lucien Bellefond will have his own way. I would rather generously make the needful advances. When you realise the true value of what I know, you will come to an understanding with me, I am sure of it."

"I do not say no. Go on."

"Well, then, Colonel Lacauassade's will was confided by Zenobia Capitaine to her niece, a young woman or girl named Virginie Lasbaysses!"

"Well, what then?" asked Trimoulac, quietly.

"That young girl repaired to Paris at the end of June. She arrived there—I have proof of that."

"Well, what then?"

"Ah! ah! my friend," replied Saint-Privat, with a smile, "I know your game; but I tell you that it will not serve you with me. I have told you all that I can tell you without committing myself. I have but one word to add, and it is this: Supposing even that you know what I have just told you, you certainly do not know what became of Virginie Lasbaysses, and that is what I can tell you."

"We have come to it at last," said Maxime Trimoulac. "You say that Zenobia Capitaine's niece has the will in her hands, that she

is now in Paris, that you know where she is, and that you propose to tell me. Is that it, eh?"

"It would be impossible to state the situation more clearly."

"Well, what do you ask for this service?"

"The property left by Colonel Lacaussade is worth two millions of francs, and I want one of them."

"That is clear enough," said Maxime. "But, my dear colleague, a million is a large sum, and before I make up my mind to promise you this amount, I have other questions to ask."

"I am waiting for them," replied Saint-Privat, who was now on the defensive.

"Will you allow me to ask how it is that you have come to propose this bargain to me, when it would be easy for you to conclude as advantageous an arrangement with the other party? If you know where Virginie Lasbaysses is at this present moment, why don't you go to your friend Lucien Bellefond, with whom you agree so well? He would not hesitate to give you a million, for he could not inherit without your help, but I, who am sure of receiving my uncle's money if the will is not found, must naturally have time to reflect over your proposal."

"My reply will be as simple as your question is natural," answered the ex-director of the dark room. "I came to you because, without your help, I cannot carry the affair to a successful termination. You see that I do not try to make myself appear better informed than I really am."

"I don't say the contrary," retorted Maxime Trimoulac, "but if I understood you aright just now, you are simply on the young girl's track, and to find her you need to complete what you already know by what I can tell you."

"That is it, I admit."

"In other words, to ensure success, we two must work together, eh?"

"It is indispensable. If we act apart, we shall not succeed at all," replied Saint-Privat, gravely.

"And to reward you, you think that a million is not too much?" inquired Maxime.

"No, it is not! It is not even half the inheritance, which amounts to more than two millions; and, on the other hand, I bring information that is more important than yours, as it is the starting-point. The sharing of the money is in your favour, although I bring the most needful information."

"Excuse me, my dear colleague," replied Trimoulac, "I am not of your opinion exactly. I even think that my co-operation gives me superior rights to those which you attribute to yourself."

"I should like to know why; but I see how it is. You mistrust me; you are afraid to buy without knowing what you are buying, and before promising, you would be very glad to have some proof of the accuracy of my statements; in a word, you would like me to

give you such details as to this niece of Zenobia Capitaine's, as would enable you to realise that I am really upon her track."

"There's no concealing anything from you, my dear colleague," said Trimoulac, delighted at hearing his adversary make these confidential remarks, and anxious to give him a chance to commit himself.

"Yes," he added, "I should, indeed, be glad to learn something precise from you as to that young person Virginie Lasbaysses. For in order to obtain valuable information from me, it would not suffice for you to say: 'I know what she did when she came to Paris.' You must confess that, unless I were a mere boy, that would be too shallow a trap for me."

There was a pause, and then Trimoulac resumed:

"We both know what we know, but it is you who have come to me. So it is for you to make the first advances if you wish me to give you any information in exchange for your own."

"Upon my word, my dear colleague, there is a pleasure in struggling with a man like you," answered Saint-Privat. "I am used to all this, and I prefer to have you to deal with rather than some stupid mule, the more so as I hope soon to have your assistance. I will therefore frankly indicate my own intentions and renounce one of my advantages by telling you that the young person in whom we are both so much interested came to Paris in masculine attire. I have now raised one corner of the veil."

Thereupon the old boy smiled blandly, with the air of a man who has just gratuitously conferred a boon upon a distressed fellow-creature.

"The corner of the veil you raise is a very little one, my dear friend. I am no better off than before, for I already knew that the damsel was dressed as a man," said Trimoulac, who, although he pretended to attach no importance to this information, had carefully taken note of it.

"The deuce you did!" muttered Saint-Privat; "then it is difficult for me to go any further without giving myself away."

The handsome Maxime twisted his dyed moustaches, and for a moment seemed to be lost in thought. His companion was eyeing him inquisitively, without evincing any inclination to speak.

"Come now, my dear colleague," Fouché's confidential agent at last said, "I do not wish to abuse my advantages, and I should really be sorry to wrest from a clever man such confessions as it would be easy for me to profit by. I prefer to act with the openness that men of our profession ought to show towards one another, and, accordingly, I will demonstrate to you, in a few words, that I have no interest in treating with you."

"It would be difficult for you to prove that, I fancy," replied the ex-director of the dark room, who could not, however, help turning somewhat pale.

"Listen to me," said Trimoulac, interrupting. "You have just

confessed to me that you cannot find this girl unless you have my help."

"And you cannot find her without my help," was Saint-Privat's quick response. "So we are even."

"No, my dear sir, not at all. Our respective situations are very different. If you do not find the sutler's niece, my uncle's will will escape you, and then you will be unarmed. No one will ever purchase what you have not got. But it is the very reverse with me. The disappearance of Virginie Lasbaysses is to my advantage, not to my detriment. I do not need the will that she has with her, as I inherit my uncle's property by the force of circumstances. So I should be a great fool to run after her. Oh! I can guess what you are going to say," added Maxime, seeing that his adversary was about to speak. "You wish to remark that Virginie will not always be out of everybody's sight. At all events, she is lost to you, and you cannot turn the Lacassade property to account without her. Moreover, if the damsel should appear at any future time, she will certainly not go to you to help her in the fulfilment of the mission which she has undertaken. So I shall not have to make up accounts with you, no matter what may happen."

Saint-Privat turned lividly pale, and bit his lips till the blood came; however, he presently replied with a show of coolness:

"You reason too fast, my dear sir. I will not waste time by remarking to you that it may be after all possible for me to find the girl. No, I prefer to say that you are changing the aspect of the question."

"How is that?"

"Well, the question is not for you to find the will, but to prevent it from being found by another."

"By whom?"

"By the person who is most interested in the matter, that is, Lucien Bellefond, who I think would be glad to take your place."

"Oh, I do not doubt that. My uncle's money would suit him exactly," rejoined Maxime Trimoulac, with a sneer.

"You must admit, then, that there is every probability that Zenobia's niece will eventually come out of her hiding-place to search for her aunt's favourite. I have very good reasons for believing that the two are looking for each other without knowing one another; and I'll wager five francs, if you like, that they will end by meeting."

"And I'll wager that they'll never meet. Come, will you bet a case of rum or a basket of champagne that Bellefond will never see either Zenobia or Virginie, or any of those accursed female relations!"

"My means do not admit of my making so heavy a bet," replied Saint-Privat, modestly, and evincing some surprise. "However, I should very much like to know——"

"Why Bellefond will not see those good-for-nothing creatures?" asked Maxime. "Well, that is my business; but never mind, I am

good-natured, and I will tell you why. Bellefond is no longer to be feared, for he is in prison. He is locked up, my dear sir."

So speaking, Fouché's agent began to rub his hands complacently.

"Locked up?" exclaimed Saint-Privat, who was unable to hide his consternation.

"Yes, and through me," said Maxime, with a chuckle. "I have spoken of him in such a way to the authorities that he is being kept in strictly secret confinement."

"He will not always be kept in prison, though," urged the ex-director of the dark room.

"Oh, it will be for a long time, at all events—a very long time, I'm sure of it."

"May I ask of what he is accused?"

"This fine fellow was arrested, in the first place, for having killed a Prussian officer since the arrival of the allies in Paris; at least so it appears."

"In a duel, of course?" said Saint-Privat, who on hearing this pricked up his ears.

"Yes, in a duel, a duel which took place without any witnesses—a duel that seems to have been something like an assassination," insisted Trimoulac.

"I have heard of that affair through some of our colleagues," said Saint-Privat, "and I believe it to be much less serious than you imagine. Bellefond can easily justify himself. He can prove that he had seconds, and that the fight was fair."

"You take up his defence very warmly, my dear sir," remarked Trimoulac, giving the old man a keen glance.

"I? Not at all. I merely remark——"

"But your remark does not amount to anything, as there is a much more serious charge than that against my cousin Bellefond."

"What is it, may I ask?"

"I might again refuse to answer, but I am quite willing to let you know that he will very soon not only be accused, but proved guilty, of taking part in a downright murder."

"A murder?" repeated Saint-Privat. "That is impossible! Lucien Bellefond is a brave soldier, and quite incapable of committing a crime."

"You have a decided weakness for my opponent," said Maxime Trimoulac, in an ironical tone. "According to you, he possesses every virtue. And noting your manner, I feel more and more surprised that you do not give him the preference in this affair of the will."

"I? Why I hardly know him," protested Saint-Privat. "What I say is a mere inference. I cannot believe, however, that an officer——"

"Has murdered anybody? Your incredulity surprises me, my dear colleague. Such things have happened before, as you must be well aware. For instance, there was Lieutenant Dautun, who cut

his brother in pieces ; and Captain Saint-Clair, who killed the beautiful Dutchwoman. They were not innocent men, I should say. However, don't be uneasy ; the crime committed by your friend Bellefond had a political motive."

"Oh, then, it is different !"

"Not as to the result," rejoined Trimoulac. "The Government does not trifle with conspirators who indulge in such things as these."

"Did Bellefond conspire?" anxiously asked the ex-director of the dark room.

"Yes, he did."

"Against the Bourbons, then, I suppose, and in Bonaparte's behalf, eh?"

"That is less certain. It seems, however, that he and his accomplices wish to overthrow all kings and emperors, and bring back the constitution of 1793."

"Come, come," said Saint-Privat, "all this isn't serious. There are no more Jacobins now."

"You are mistaken, my dear colleague ; and it is easy to see that you no longer belong to the 'house.' If you had remained with us, you would know that the brave *sans-culottes* with whom you were acquainted in your youth have never given up the hope of bringing back the happy times of the year II. Many of these fellows became senators and prefects under the Empire, no doubt. We even know one who is still a minister under Louis XVIII. But the others, those who have had no share in the cake, have never ceased to conspire in secret ; and, indeed, when Bonaparte escaped from the island of Elba, and came back to Paris, they were about to attempt a great stroke."

"And does Lucien Bellefond belong to the gang?" inquired the ex-director of the dark room.

"Certainly !"

"I cannot get over it !" muttered Saint-Privat. "If anybody but you had told me this——"

"You would not have believed it? I see. You must have proof? Well, then, I will give you proof ; and more than enough. You will not say after this, my dear colleague, that I have not done all I could to please you."

"Believe me, I shall not be ungrateful ; but, for pity's sake, tell me what conspiracy the imprudent young fellow has taken part in."

"Imprudent young fellow, indeed ! You really amuse me," exclaimed Maxime Trimoulac. "I must tell you what it is, however. By the way, did you ever hear of the 'Brethren of the Plaster'?"

"Never."

"Nor of the 'Companions of the Trowel'?" urged Colonel Lacaussado's nephew.

"No. What may these brethren and companions be?" asked Saint-Privat, in all simplicity.

"Fellows who propose effecting nothing less than a revolution, and who are thus named because they have a little playful way of walling-up such persons as they wish to get rid of."

"Walling them up?"

"Yes. They place them alive in a hole made in a wall, and then put plaster over them," said Maxime.

"This is perfectly horrible!" ejaculated Saint-Privat.

"Oh, for my own part, I do not know of any expression that is strong enough to characterise such a frightful proceeding. And it is not on the spur of the moment that they do this. They do it advisedly whenever they wish to suppress any one. They seize upon some poor devil and wall him up."

"Where? These abominations cannot take place in any chance spot," said Saint-Privat.

"No, indeed. The gentlemen of the plaster have chosen a locality that suits their proceedings exactly."

"Would it be indiscreet to ask where?"

"Not at all, my dear colleague, not at all," replied Maxime. "I have all the less reason for hiding it, as I mean to deliver all these rascals over to the authorities; and as the trial will be public, all Paris will know what a strange place they chose for their meetings. Just fancy! they meet in the deserted quarries under the height of Montmartre."

"It is not possible."

"Such is the case, as I have the honour to tell you. These vaults are immense, and the bandits enter them by a passage which is known only to the initiated."

"And when they get there they wall up their victims?" asked Saint-Privat, who felt amazed.

"Yes, indeed. The pillars that uphold the vault serve for this purpose; and it seems that if the pillars were opened the bodies of the victims would be found inside them."

"But who do these men treat in this way? I have not heard of any important person disappearing of late," said the ex-director of the dark room.

"Oh, this frightful punishment is meted out to various people, especially spies, and such people as are suspected of watching the association; and also to such members as are accused of betraying the others."

"Upon my word! my dear colleague," exclaimed Saint-Privat, "you have made a discovery that is interesting, indeed, and it will do you great honour at the 'house,' for no doubt you will enable the authorities to find these wretches."

"Yes, indeed," replied Maxime Trimoulac, with a harsh frown on his pale face, "I will deliver them up; and I am only waiting to find them in the very act of meeting in the bowels of the earth. It seems that they meet by torch-light, with masks on their faces. Oh! it is very curious, and the affair will make a great stir."

But, to hide nothing from you, I owe the revelation of this secret to another."

"Some one of us?" queried the ex-director of the dark-room, with an inquisitive air.

"No, no, my dear friend. However, I have nothing to conceal from you, and I will tell you that the 'Companies of the Trowel' were betrayed to me by one of themselves."

Trimoulac paused impressively.

"And do you think that the traitor deserves to be believed?" asked Saint-Privat.

"I am sure of it; and I have already partly verified his assertions. I must tell you, to begin with, that at the time of the first Restoration, the government heard of their goings-on, and I was told to watch them. I had succeeded tolerably well, for I had managed to enter the society, and I was on the point of having all the threads of the conspiracy in my hands, when I was forced to leave France owing to the occurrences of the 20th of March, when, as you remember, Bonaparte returned. After that, unfortunately, I did not renew my connection, except with some subordinate brethren, and I did not know either the leaders or the place where the great meetings took place, or else I should certainly have succeeded in knowing who the chief members were."

"And did you take up the matter again after the return of the allies?"

"No, I did not. I was prevented doing so by other public business, and also by my own private affairs. A certain journey to Périgueux took up a great deal of my time. However, by a piece of good luck, which I had not counted upon, I had scarcely reached Paris when one of the 'Brethren of the Plaster,' whom I had formerly known, came to me and denounced the whole gang."

"And you have not yet sent in your report to his excellency?" asked Saint-Privat, who was all attention.

"To Fouché?" replied Maxime. "Oh! I took good care not to do that for two reasons: the first was that the affair was not yet ripe; some one else might have seized upon it and cut the grass from under my feet. The second reason was that I wished above all things to catch all these rascals together, and with good proofs that would send them direct to the guillotine on the Place de Grève."

"And this, I suppose, is why you have not denounced Bellefond?" asked Saint-Privat.

"Oh! I need not hasten, so far as he is concerned, since I have him under lock and key. He is now arrested, through me, and he will remain in prison long enough for me to find all the elements of a capital accusation against him."

"Oh, indeed!" said Saint-Privat, still feigning incredulity, but visibly bewildered by what he heard.

"This surprises you, I see," said Trimoulac, coolly. "No matter. He has a record that will condemn him to death: conspiracy against"

the lawful king, against the safety of the State, and complicity in an assassination. I trust that they will cut off his head—and they will. So do you think now, my dear sir, that I need trouble myself very much about my competitor for my uncle's inheritance?" demanded Maxime Trimoulac, throwing himself back in his chair.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Saint-Privat in his turn; and then assuming an air of profound wisdom, he remarked: "The dead shut out the living, as you are well aware, my dear colleague, and it would suffice to prove that Lucien Bellefond survived Colonel Lacaussade even by an hour's time, and inherited in virtue of a will, for the fortune to escape you. But before I say anything more on that point, I must again express my surprise, yes, my great surprise, that this young man should have anything to do with an assassination. He may have conspired, oh, yes! I am very willing to believe that, but not the rest. It is really too incredible!"

"Well, my dear friend," retorted Maxime Trimoulac, "it is proved with the utmost clearness that your virtuous lieutenant assisted in the walling-up of an individual who had been condemned by the rascals in question. And do you know who they thought they were thus sending to another world. Do you know, eh? Why, your servant, my dear sir, that is, myself!"

"Yourself!"

"Yes, I, Maxime Trimoulac." And seeing the effect he produced, the scamp began to chuckle.

"You must be joking," protested the amazed Saint-Privat; "why, you are here alive."

"Excuse me," rejoined Fouché's confidential agent, "I did not say that they had executed me, but that they thought they had."

"Then some one else perished in your stead?" was the apt retort.

"Exactly."

"Do you know the name of this unfortunate person?" inquired Saint-Privat, as he settled his glasses.

"No, not yet; but I shall know it. All that I can tell you so far is, that I was denounced to the vengeance of the 'Brethren of the Plaster,' and that one night a certain band of cut-throats went noiselessly into a house where it was expected I should be found. My good star protected me, no doubt, for I did not go there. To make up for that, however, they found a person there—in the dark—whom they took for me. They garroted and gagged that person, and finally carried him away and walled him up in one of the pillars of a disused quarry of the Butte Montmartre."

"Great heaven! when did this horrible event take place?" asked Saint-Privat, trying to hide his emotion, which, for various reasons was keen indeed.

"The crime was committed on the first Sunday of last July, at about nine o'clock in the evening," replied Maxime Trimoulac, in all simplicity.

"And they had the audacity to come here, to this house where we now are, to commit such an act of violence?" asked Saint-Privat, in a somewhat incredulous tone of voice.

"Here? What nonsense! Do you think that people would look for me here?" replied Trimoulac. "No, no, I don't compromise my good friend Zoé. No one knows that I have a house in the Rue de la Grange-Batelière, and there was no danger that the 'Brethren of the Plaster' would come here after me. The abduction took place, if you must know the truth, at a pavilion, a mere stopping-place, which I very seldom make use of."

"In the country, I suppose?" said Saint-Privat, in his insinuating way.

"In the suburbs, near the Barrière Rochechouart, on the Chaussée de Clignancourt."

The ex-director of the dark room was now almost wild with delight.

The secret which, in spite of all his diplomacy, he had at first failed to wrest from his adversary, he now knew; it was Maxime Trimoulac himself who had betrayed it without intending to do so.

For there could be no doubt whatever but what Virginie Lasbaysses in person had thrown herself into the lion's mouth, and had been led there by a false letter bearing Lucien Bellefond's signature. To arrive at that conclusion, it was only necessary to compare Cornillon's statements with Trimoulac's revelations.

The young man who had taken the coach just outside Périgueux, and who, according to his own statement, had been going to find his father wounded at Waterloo, was none other than Zenobia Capitaine's niece travelling in male attire. This seeming young man had gone to the little house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt, and had been seized there and carried away by unknown persons.

All this was clearly demonstrated by the facts now known to Clarisse's father. He had known a good deal already, when he entered the house of the Baroness de Sainte-Gauburge, the lady love of Maxime Trimoulac, alias the "Chevalier de Loupiac;" still, he had not then known what he now knew; that is to say, what had been done with the poor innocent girl.

Now, however, he was acquainted with her abductors, since Trimoulac had been imprudent enough to tell him of the crime in which Lucien was supposed to have had a hand.

Virginie had been carried off by the so-called "Brethren of the Plaster," who had believed her to be the spy whom they were looking for, and she had then been dragged into the quarries of the Butte Montmartre, and walled up in one of the pillars inside. And, to all appearance, Colonel Lacaussade's will was still in her pocket.

Saint-Privat had nothing more to learn.

To complete the unexpected stroke of good fortune which had befallen him, placing him upon the track of the precious document.

the possession of which was equivalent to a treasure, Maxime Trimoulac, the heir-at-law, did not as yet suspect that the person who had been executed in his stead was Zenobia's messenger, and had the colonel's will with her.

He knew only a part of the sinister occurrence, of which Saint-Privat on his side, also, knew a part; and the latter alone was in a position to profit by his knowledge.

Light having streamed at last upon so much mystery, the jubilant co-director of the dark room now only desired to shorten his interview with Colonel Lacaussade's heir-at-law, and get out of the house.

He no longer needed to hold out a lure and risk a partial confession to lead on to fresh admissions, or to provoke his companion's revelations by an assumption of seeming frankness.

He had previously desired to advance, whereas he now wished to draw back.

He even feared that he had said too much in speaking of the masculine attire worn by the young girl on her arrival from Périgord. To produce the effect he desired, he must not, however, appear to change his tactics too suddenly. That would never do; in fact, it might compromise everything.

The admirer of the Baroness de Sainte-Gauburge was still clear-headed, in spite of the number of glassfuls of rum which he had imbibed while he was talking.

Saint-Privat thought the best way to avoid putting him upon his guard would be to delay rising for a while. Indeed, it was preferable to prolong the conversation until he found a chance of going off without seeming over-anxious to depart.

This course was the more advisable, as he wished to obtain some additional information.

For instance, he wanted to make quite sure that his ingenious enemy had not made up this dramatic story just to throw him off the track; and he also wished to know to what extent his enemy was informed as to the facts he had stated, and what course he meant to follow in reference to the matter.

"This is incredible," he said aloud; "how will the public ever be made to believe that such atrocious deeds are perpetrated in Paris in the nineteenth century? I should not believe it myself, my dear sir, if the practice of our profession had not so frequently shown me that reality outstrips the wildest inventions of the romance writer."

"Bah!" exclaimed Maxime Trimoulac, with a sneer. "I have seen worse things than that, and this proceeding on the part of the masons, although it may be somewhat novel and even ingenious, did not greatly surprise me."

"I can understand that," replied Saint-Privat, approvingly. "When a man has managed matters for the 'house' nothing surprises him. For my own part, however, I am somewhat rusty and less accustomed than you are to the rascalities of conspirators. This causes me to be astonished without cause, and I am really afraid you

think me very simple. But tell me, I beg, how you learned all these details? It is simply my love of our profession that leads me to ask you this."

"Why, I have already told you how it was, my dear fellow," said Trimoulac, who was once more sipping some rum; "it was a 'Companion of the Trowel' who came to me of his own accord and told me all the secrets of his accomplices."

"And are you perfectly sure that he was telling the truth?" asked Saint-Privat.

"Perfectly so. I was acquainted with him when I was with the gang, and I more than once had occasion to convince myself of his goodwill and sincerity."

"Then he has put you in a position to have the whole association arrested? This capture will make your fortune, my dear colleague, and his excellency the Duke of Otranto will not fail to compensate you so generously that you will be able to do without your uncle's money."

So saying Saint-Privat winked and indulged in a quiet chuckle.

"Ta! ta! ta! you go too fast, my good fellow. Fouché is not so liberal as all that, confound him! Besides, you ought to know him—and I do not give up the dear colonel's money by any means. Moreover, the man who told me all this did not tell me the names of these masons. He himself is only an unimportant member, and does not know the leaders. He has never seen the face of the president of these ruffians, the man whom they call the Grand Mason or Master, and he does not know his real name. However, we shall succeed in unmasking them all, you may depend upon it."

"Oh! I do not doubt it," said Saint-Privat, blandly. "A conspiracy, you know, is like a string of beads—when one falls all fall. In the affair of Georges Cadoudal, it was a gun-wad picked up on the cliff at Biville that set the inquiries afoot, and I myself was put on the track of the inventors of the infernal machine by one of the shoes of the horse which pulled the barrel full of powder."

"It is really delightful to converse with a man of your experience," said Trimoulac, somewhat ironically, as he poured himself out another glass of wine. "Besides, the denouncer in question gave me some precious information in telling me that the meetings of the conspirators were held at the Butte Montmartre, and by showing me the way into their cavern."

"Have you explored the place already?" asked the ex-director of the dark room.

"Not exactly; indeed, I have not had time enough to explore the den, and, on the other hand, it is somewhat dangerous to do so. So I contented myself with going to look at the entrance, and I found it without any great difficulty, although it is very conveniently hidden by the brambles at the foot of the height. I went, however, some way along a dark and narrow passage."

"This is astonishing!" exclaimed Saint-Privat, rubbing his chin.

"I have passed hundreds of times before the height, which serves as the pedestal for the Montmartre mills, and yet I never saw the slightest fissure or passage. I wonder where this famous passage is situated."

"On the esplanade, at the bottom and on the right side of the hill, facing the Chaussée de Clignancourt. But, I say, why do you ask me all that?" suddenly demanded Trimoulac.

"Oh, for nothing," stammered Saint-Privat, somewhat taken aback. "It is mere curiosity on my part."

"Confess that you wish to make sure as to the accusation which hangs over your friend, that precious fool, Lucien Bellefond," said Trimoulac, sniggering.

"Bellefond is not my friend, I assure you," replied the old spy, warmly.

"Whether he is or not, one thing is certain, his fate is settled. That fine half-pay lieutenant is among those whom my informant knows personally."

"Still, that does not prove that he took any part in the execution of the victims," said Saint-Privat.

"Excuse me," retorted Maxime. "I have proof that he was present at the last affair, when my unfortunate substitute became the victim of the masons."

Saint-Privat could not help starting at the thought that Lucien had contributed to the murder of the faithful messenger who had come to Paris to deliver him the will, which entitled him to the colonel's millions.

"Was the informer present at this abominable scene?" he asked.

"He was one of the very brethren who, by the Grand Mason's orders, were to seize me in my little house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt," replied Maxime Trimoulac.

"Then he is as culpable as the rest," said Clarisse's father, "and I should not trust him if I were you."

"Oh, I am not naturally revengeful," rejoined Trimoulac, carelessly waving his hand and all but upsetting his glass of rum. "And, besides, informers are always forgiven; you know that as well as I do, my dear colleague. This precious fellow knows it, too, and he is quite willing to testify when the time comes. Meanwhile, to deprive him of all desire to return to his old friends, I have had him shut up in the prison of La Force, where he is given all sorts of liberties, so as to keep him in the right frame of mind."

"That is a wise precaution, my dear colleague," said Saint-Privat, nodding his head approvingly. "I admire your prudence, and I am beginning to fear that my client, as you call the lieutenant, is in a bad scrape. But excuse me if I ask more. This story is so very interesting that I very naturally desire to hear all the details. Tell me how it is that these fellows mistook some one else for you, when they must have had a description of your person?"

"Yes, indeed," said Trimoulac. "I understand that it seems strange: however, you know that at night-time all cats are grey. The Grand Mason's emissaries saw an individual seated at a table with his back to them, in the very room on the ground-floor where they had expected to find me. It seems that this unknown person was almost as tall as I am, and of much the same figure as myself. Well, those 'Brethren of the Plaster' are quick workers. They fell upon this fellow, upset the light, tied him, gagged him, and finally put him in a sack."

"In a sack?" exclaimed the ex-director of the dark room, opening his eyes in astonishment.

"Yes, indeed! That is their usual method, it seems, at least so my informant tells me."

"And then they carried him away, I suppose?" asked Clarisse's father, somewhat too eagerly.

Trimoulac, however, was well started, and he unsuspectingly resumed his narrative.

"Oh! at once," said he. "The Butte Montmartre is not far off, you see. Two of their accomplices were waiting for them, and were watching at the entrance of the cavern. Of these two sentinels, one was your dear friend, Lucien Bellefond. My informant has sworn to me that he recognised him at once."

"I can't get over it!" exclaimed Saint-Privat, relapsing into his former astonishment.

"What would you say if you knew that the said Bellefond followed the party into the cavern, where the whole band had assembled in solemn council, including the president, who wore a mask over his face and all his insignia, and that the unfortunate fellow in the sack was tried, sentenced, and executed on the spot? Indeed, it was all over in a few minutes. Your lieutenant did not touch the plaster, no doubt, but his presence amply sufficed to make him the accomplice of an assassination, or else I'm very much mistaken."

"That is undeniable, and no court would acquit him," said Saint-Privat. "But one more question, my dear colleague; that will be the last. Have you any idea as to who the poor devil who underwent this frightful punishment could be?"

It was not without considerable hesitation that the ex-director of the dark room asked this momentous question.

The situation had now become an exciting one. A single unguarded word might help Maxime Trimoulac to discover who this unfortunate victim was, and in that case the game would be lost irrevocably.

But, on the other hand, Clarisse's fond parent wished above all things to make quite sure that his adversary had not thought of any connection between the fate of the masons' victim and the disappearance of Zenobia's emissary, Virginie Lasbaysses. Accordingly it was to elucidate this important point that he risked this question, fraught with peril though it was.

"I do not know," answered the so-called Chevalier du Loupiac, without the slightest hesitation. "It might very well have been some one from the 'house' sent to me by my superiors with some urgent communication. I am half inclined to believe it. The authorities were all upset that night, and others could not be very regularly attended to when the cannon of the allies was booming so loudly. I have since heard that two or three of our agents vanished in the midst of it all. My supposition is therefore plausible."

Saint-Privat drew a long breath. This reply had raised a terrible weight from his heart. All was safe so far.

"Yes, yes, it is evident," he exclaimed.

"Besides," resumed Maxime Trimoulac, "we shall some day know who it was for certain."

"How is that?"

"Yes, certainly," responded Maxime, after sipping his rum again, "when the 'Brethren of the Plaster' are tried, or, for want of anything better, when Lieutenant Lucien Bellefond is tried. For I must tell you that I have a surprise in reserve for my dear cousin, Lucien. He! he! when he is before the court, he will deny everything, of course. Then I shall bring my informer forward, and he will recount the whole scene in the cavern. It will be a perfectly dramatic situation, and you can foresee the result of this evidence. The whole court will repair ceremoniously to the Montmartre quarries. Oh! there'll be a talk all over Paris, I'll answer for that—in fact, all over the world--and the affair will rank among the most celebrated cases on record. My informant has positively sworn to me that he can point out the very pillar in which the victim was walled up. It will be demolished in presence of the magistrates, and the body of the victim will be seen by one and all."

This programme, enunciated in a careless tone, made Saint-Privat start. He was at once a prey to hope and anxiety.

"If I let him go on," thought the former director of the dark room, "he will be disinheriting himself. He does not dream that it was Zenobia's niece who was walled up, and that the will would be found with her body."

Saint-Privat, who was extremely quick-witted, at once added in his own mind: "Trimoulac would then lose the inheritance, which would revert to Lucien Bellefond, but in that case I should lose it too. I cannot let matters follow that course, and I must take proper measures at once."

Thereupon he concluded that he had nothing more to find out from his adversary, and that it was time to go, covering his retreat, however, by some skilful final words.

"Upon my word, my dear colleague," said he, "I am baffled, so far as all this goes, and I cannot do anything with Lucien Bellefond. That is quite certain. But you had a narrow escape, I must say. Every one is exposed to great danger in our profession, still I confess that I never heard the like of this before."

"You speak the truth," answered Fouché's confidential spy. "The devil certainly took good care of me that day. Just fancy my having made an appointment with an English spy, whom I had seen the evening before at Wellington's headquarters, to meet me at my house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt! He let me know in the afternoon that he could not come. That is what saved me. If I had, unluckily, gone to the 'house,' I should have been caught. But I preferred to saunter that evening round the wooden galleries of the Palais-Royal, where I have some acquaintances——"

"Among others, a certain Zulma," said Saint-Privat, with a knowing wink.

"Aha! you remember following me from the post-office, I see! Well, well. I was saying that I went to the Palais-Royal on that famous night of the 2nd of July, and, as good luck never comes singly, I there met your friend Monsieur Lucien Bellefond, who quarrelled with me at the café of the Rotunda, and was even so foolish as to give me his card. Ah! I was deuced glad to get it."

"Then it was you he met," thought Saint-Privat to himself, remembering the scene which he had witnessed at the café while taking his milk posse. He had good cause to recollect Lucien's quarrel with the man who was reading the newspaper.

"And now, my dear colleague," resumed Maxime Trimoulac, with a patronising air, "you know the full value of your friend Lucien Bellefond's claims and prospects, so I hope that we shall resume the conversation where we left off, and that you will make no further difficulty about telling me what you really know as to Zenobia Capitaine's niece, this Virginie Lasbaysses. I am master of the situation—you must admit that—for I have shown you clearly, beyond all doubt whatever, that I can do without you, whereas you cannot do without me."

"You are altogether mistaken. I do not need you," thought Clarisse's father to himself.

"Still, I think," added Madame de Sainte-Gauburge's admirer, "that all trouble deserves remuneration. So, pray finish your confidential communications, tell me all that you have to say, and, if I find anything useful in the information, I shall not refuse a part of the winnings to you. However, I warn you that I shall keep the lion's share, as is the custom on board a pirate ship. I represent the captain, and you the sailors."

"Excuse me, my dear colleague," now said the old man, assuming an air of great simplicity, "I do not think that we shall share anything at all, for, unfortunately, I have nothing more to tell. The fact is—and I'm half ashamed to confess it—I have emptied my bag, as one says."

"Emptied your bag!" exclaimed Trimoulac in astonishment. "Come, come, that is impossible! You began the conversation very promisingly. Think again, and I am sure that you will remember several very interesting things to tell me."

"No, I assure you," meekly replied the ex director of the dark room.

"Come, I will help you," resumed Maxime, who had apparently not yet recovered from his surprise. "Where did we stop? Ah, yes, you were telling me that Virginie had come to Paris in men's clothes."

Trimoulac had now come to the point, indeed. At these words, which showed that he had said too much, Saint-Privat rose a little quicker than was prudent under the circumstances.

"I am afraid that I am taking up too much of your time, my dear colleague," he stammered, "and, in fact, I must really go."

"What! Already?" exclaimed Trimoulac, who was still flurried. "At least let me introduce you to the baroness, my friend Zoé. She will be delighted to make your acquaintance, I am sure."

"Thanks, my dear colleague, a thousand thanks—another time—and now excuse me for having detained you so long," muttered Saint-Privat, making haste to reach the door.

"Virginie walled-up in a pillar in a quarry at Montmartre, the will in Virginie's pockets," he muttered, as he went down the stairs of the house. "I will have that will, I will have it, even if I have to blow up the whole Butte Montmartre to get it. The entrance to the quarry is on the esplanade, eh? on the side of the Chaussée de Clignancourt. Well, well, we'll see." Then the old spy went on his way pondering deeply.

While he was soliloquising, Maxime Trimoulac, who had perforce let him go, muttered: "What an old idiot!" and then began to walk up and down the boudoir.

"The rascal did not come here for nothing, however," he soon resumed. "Why did he go off so suddenly? Why did he become so reticent after talking just like a blind magpie? Can he have obtained any clue from me? What am I to think of his saying that Virginie Lasbaysses came to Paris dressed as a man?"

Then he took another turn up and down the room, still brooding over the situation.

"A thousand devils!" he suddenly exclaimed, angrily stamping his foot. "I had forgotten that I had written to Périgueux to make an appointment with Virginie Lasbaysses at the little house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt. She must have gone there disguised as a man, since she was wearing men's clothes—that old rascal told me so—and it must have been she whom the 'Brethren of the Plaster' walled-up. Ah! confound it, that old villain knows everything now, and he is quite capable of going to remove the girl from the pillar to find the will. Ah! upon my word! I'll prevent that, my dear sir. I'll show you soon what sort of stuff I'm made of!"

Then Trimoulac hastily seated himself and began to devise a new plan.

XIV.

THE home of the banker of the Rue des Bourdonnais was never very gay, but for some days past it had been terribly sad and gloomy.

Monsieur Vernède in terror noticed the 11th of September drawing nigh when that terrible debt, that sum of three hundred thousand francs owing to the Marquis de Baffey, must be paid ; and his daughter, who usually consoled him in all his troubles, did not even attempt to give him courage.

The poor girl was being most cruelly tried. After a month of almost unalloyed happiness—that which had followed upon Lucien's return—the sky had become dark again, and the blast of misfortune was once more shaking the flower of her love.

She had at first been told that her lover would be obliged to go and stay in some retired part of the environs of Paris, and as soon as she received this intimation it had been agreed that she should go with her father to visit him there.

It cost her great pain to cease seeing Lucien daily, but to preserve him from danger she would readily have borne much greater pain than that.

One day, however, Vernède had returned home with a thoughtful brow and a haggard face. Thérèse questioned him as to the cause of his worry, and he avoided replying. But he told her that she must give up for a time the thought of the happy hours which she had hoped to pass with the lieutenant in his suburban hiding-place.

In following this course, the banker bore Lucien's last prayer in mind.

"Do not tell her that I have been arrested."

Thus had the young man spoken before going off with the gendarmes.

Thomas Vernède had sufficient control over himself to keep the sad truth from his daughter. "Why grieve her so deeply?" he thought. "If Bellefond succeeds in getting out of the grip of the police, it would be better to spare Thérèse an agony of suspense. If he cannot justify and free himself, it would be better that she should remain ignorant of his sentence for ever."

The banker hoped that his daughter would content herself with the excuses he might invent, and believe that Lucien had voluntarily renounced the pleasure of seeing her rather than lose his liberty. Indeed, this explanation seemed to him quite plausible enough to explain the turn which affairs had taken, for he did not fully estimate the feelings of a loving heart, or that insight

possessed by lovers which enables them to detect all the dangers threatening the beloved one just as they reciprocally guess the most secret thoughts of each other's minds.

Accordingly, it happened that Thérèse was not deceived for a single instant. She at once realised that Lucien must be either in prison or dead, as he again gave no signs of life; and in order to find out what had become of him, she resolved to go and see a friend who had not the same reasons for being silent as her father had.

That friend was our worthy acquaintance, Timoléon Machefer, who, like most old bachelors, was fond of other people's children, and could refuse nothing to the daughter of his old chum Vernède. Besides, he did not agree with all the banker's ideas as to the young girl and her lover.

As regards Lucien's arrest, for instance, the puritanical financier could not admit of any temporising. He would not disarm for a moment, or make any effort to conciliate the authorities, whom he hated with all the force of his Republican prejudices. It was different, however, with Machefer. The provision merchant thought that, however serious the late events might be, something might yet be done to prevent or diminish their sad effects.

His motto was: "Help yourself, and heaven will help you," and instead of subsiding into sadness and resignation, like his friend the banker, he acted with all the native activity and energy he possessed.

He made it his first duty to find out in what prison Lucien was detained, and to inquire what turn his affair was taking.

Machefer, be it remarked, had an excellent reputation as a commercial man, and was greatly esteemed in his neighbourhood, where no one for a moment imagined that he was a conspirator. Being so favourably looked upon, he took courage to present himself at the office of the local commissary of police, without fear of being rudely treated.

He was, indeed, cordially received by the official who had arrested Lucien, and this functionary, who was a good-natured, obliging man, made no difficulty about telling him that the prisoner was at the Conciergerie for the time being, and was only charged with having killed the Prussian major under more or less suspicious circumstances.

This information, favourable as it was, did not set the prudent Machefer's mind at rest; for, knowing that the denunciation had come from Maxime Trimoulac, he foresaw a bitter persecution of Lucien Bellefond, as the latter happened to be the heir of the late Colonel Lacaussade.

The provision dealer did not doubt but what Trimoulac would use all his hidden influence to rid himself for ever of his rival, and, besides, he knew that Trimoulac, whilst calling himself the Chevalier de Loupiac, had spied upon the masons, in view of handing them over to the law.

Therein lay the real danger, and accordingly it was in this direction that Timoléon began his investigations.

He saw several masons whom he knew, and asked them about the rumours that were current.

The society was now scattered, and the conspirators were careful not to show themselves, or take any steps whatever, for fear of provoking harsh measures on the part of the government.

Even the most zealous of the conspirators quietly bided their time, waiting for a summons from the Grand Mason, while many of the others hoped that they would never be called upon to meet their colleagues again.

Machefer spoke with several subordinate members who had better opportunities than himself of knowing how the land lay in the "Rue de Jérusalem," as people then called the police headquarters, and he had the satisfaction of learning that none of them had heard that the police were at work anent the plot which was already several months old.

The government of King Louis XVIII. was at that time very busy with other matters—questions of foreign policy, and so on—and probably it did not wish to notice the past occurrences, unless some denunciation set the blood-hounds of the police upon a new track.

Unfortunately, our friend Machefer was not without apprehensions in that respect. He had spoken to two members who had belonged to the squad which had been appointed to arrest the so-called Chevalier de Loupiac at his hiding-place on the Chaussée de Clignancourt, and these fellows had told him that they suspected one of their colleagues, named Cyrille, of treachery.

This man, who, indeed, had led the squad on the 2nd of July, had been seen, several times, prowling about the Ministry of Police, and talking to suspicious-looking men. A still more serious point was that he was no longer seen in the neighbourhood where he had hitherto resided, and there was a rumour that he had made a fortune and gone off into the country. To those who knew the man, however, this report seemed the height of improbability.

Having obtained this information, Machefer was quite able to reply to the questions asked him by his friend Vernède's daughter, and he did not have the cruelty to refuse to tell her what she wished to know.

In point of fact, he told her all, from the beginning of the fatal adventure into which Lucien had been led. He said that the young man, falling a victim to his own kindness of heart, had been seen by a spy at the moment when he was helping an officer of the royal escort who had been thrown from his horse.

He did not even think it advisable to hide from her the fact that this wounded man was none other than the Marquis de Baffey, Thomas Vernède's creditor, and the rejected suitor to her—Thérèse's—hand.

He finally told her, moreover, that Lucien had been denounced and arrested on the same day as this accident had occurred, and that he had been conveyed forthwith to the Conciergerie, where he was kept in strictly secret confinement. However, he also assured her that he was simply accused of having fought a duel in a coach, and would, no doubt, soon be in a position to clear himself.

Thérèse had never heard of the masons of whom her father was the leader, and this was not the proper moment to reveal to her such a sad and dangerous secret.

Accordingly, Machefer merely hinted that Lucien Bellefond's political opinions might cause him some trouble, and that his imprisonment might last for a long time. He thought it as well to say this, as, in the event of some misfortune, Thérèse would be in a measure prepared to meet it.

He naturally added such consolations as his friendship for the poor girl suggested, and bidding her say nothing of their conversation to Vernède, he promised to make every effort to secure the prisoner's release.

He avoided telling her of the valuable information which he had obtained in Périgueux with regard to Lucien Bellefond's inheritance, for this was hardly his secret; and, besides, he naturally thought that money matters would not interest the young girl when her lover's life was in danger.

Still less did he speak of his anxiety as to the fate of Zenobia Capitaine's niece, the ill-fated Virginie, and the unlooked-for resurrection of the odious Chevalier de Loupiac. Any talk on these subjects would merely have confused Thérèse, who was in complete ignorance respecting them.

However, thanks to Machefer, three days after Lucien's arrest, Thérèse knew a great deal that her father believed her to be unaware of.

Her life now became a terrible one. She was obliged to appear calm whenever her father was present, and she spent most of her time weeping in her own room, whither she retreated to hide her grief. She did not dare to question Machefer anew, when he came at night-time, and talked for hours with her father. Such a course would naturally have roused the banker's suspicions.

Poor Thérèse had a friend, and even a confidant, however, in the person of her young acquaintance, *Æsop*. The provision dealer had, on her account, deprived himself of the services which the little humpback was beginning to render at the shop in the Rue Montmartre, so as to let him remain with her.

So *Æsop* spent long hours upon a stool at the feet of the banker's daughter, and they talked over the past together.

They spoke of that morning when they had experienced such dramatic adventures, when, two poor, weak creatures though they were, they had succeeded in freeing Saint-Privat's captive, and they prayed heaven to enable them to release Lucien from his jailers once more.

Unfortunately, the prison of the Conciergerie was less easy of access than the mysterious house in the Rue d'Enfer, and this time they could not devise any means of opening the doors of the prisoner's cell.

Thérèse despaired of succeeding, and even *Æsop* had but a very faint hope.

He listened attentively to all that the young girl said, and she confidently informed him of every particular of her lover's unfortunate adventure; his meeting with a police spy at the moment when he was helping M. de Baffey, who had fallen from his horse whilst escorting the king's carriage, and his going to the house in the Rue de Varennes, in company with the infamous detective, who had clung to him until they reached the corner of the Rue du Jour.

On the morning of the fourth day the little humpback had an idea. He asked Thérèse's permission to absent himself; and even told her a fib, asserting that Frantz, Machefer's cashier, needed him to make out a list of a large consignment of sardines and herrings.

The young girl granted his request at once.

To tell the truth, she was sadder than usual that day, and had not even courage enough to listen to the consoling remarks of her faithful companion in misfortune.

The boy went away; but, instead of going to the Rue du Jour, he walked towards the Seine.

Where was he going? Thérèse would have wondered had she seen him, but he himself was well acquainted with his purpose—in sooth, a bold one.

The youngster had found out that Lucien would not have been arrested if his generosity had not led him to help an officer of the king's escort—a great nobleman, a marquis—and *Æsop*, although he had not a very clear idea of what a nobleman might be, thought that if this gentleman interfered Lucien would not remain much longer in prison.

In his childish simplicity, he believed that gratitude was always in proportion to the benefit conferred.

He was not aware that the Marquis de Baffey and the young lieutenant were rivals in love, and this ignorance was fortunate, for he would never have dared to repair to the Rue de Varennes if he had suspected the antagonism which existed between these two men, who seemed so fitted to agree, if not as regards politics, at least on other questions. But unfortunately, as chance would have it, they were rivals in love.

Æsop's fortunate ignorance of the truth had also prevented him from telling Thérèse of his purpose, from which she would assuredly have deterred him.

Still, although he did not doubt but what he would be able to interest the marquis in Lucien Bellefond's misfortunes, he was by no means sure that he would be able to see this high personage.

He scarcely knew where the Rue de Varennes was. He had never

gone through it, and with childish fancy he imagined the abode of the officer of the Black Musketeers must be like the castles in the fairy tales, protected by walls of iron and defended by giants.

Still the courageous though fragile lad did not hesitate for an instant. He had seen his protectress weep, and he could not bear that sight.

In the hope of restoring her to happiness he would, indeed, have braved all the giants in the world, and he had proved as much on the day when he had knocked at the door of the house in the Rue d'Enfer, and fallen into the clutches of Saint-Privat's hireling.

Now, the marquis's house could not be more dreadful than that lair, where the doorkeeper had put out his arms to drag in the person bold enough to knock at the door.

Thus thinking, Æsop went boldly on to the Faubourg Saint-Germain, passed over the Pont-Neuf, followed the quays on the left shore of the Seine, as far as the Rue du Bac, and then, without any difficulty, found the Rue de Varennes.

However, before he reached the house which bore Number 19, he slackened his pace. His difficulties were about to begin.

Even now-a-days it is not easy for a shabbily-dressed lad to get into one of the aristocratic mansions in that quarter of Paris, and in 1815 possibly there were even more difficulties in the way than there are now.

Little Æsop had not even the resource of going in as if to beg, or, what comes to the same thing, to sing those songs which are intended as appeals to the charity of the inhabitants, as is the case in certain parts of Paris. He expected to find the majestic carriage-way closed against him, and he was trying to think of some means of getting in.

However, when he came to the door of the mansion, he was greatly surprised. The portal was even more imposing than he had expected, but it was open, and in front of it, on the foot pavement, there stood a couple well calculated to attract his attention.

One of the pair was a young girl, who had a fine figure, and was stylishly dressed; the other being a man of unprepossessing appearance. They were both absorbed in looking at what was going on in the courtyard, and it was not difficult to guess that they wished to enter, but did not dare to do so.

After all, however, their behaviour was in no way remarkable, and the humpback might not have noticed them, but for the fact that he at once remembered the face of the man.

It was the same ill-favoured rascal who had seized him by the collar and thrown him into a cellar on the day when, in view of obliging Mademoiselle Vernède, he had courageously knocked at M. Bonnin's door in the Rue d'Enfer.

Now Saint-Privat's hireling possessed one of those faces that are not likely to be forgotten, and poor Æsop positively shuddered as he recognised the scamp.

What had he come there for? Such was the little humpback's first thought, and it was really a very difficult question to answer.

Bourdache had donned his best clothes, and was trying to look like a respectable man, but he did not succeed in this respect. All his efforts to seem above his station had only resulted in giving him the appearance of a subaltern detective.

The lad was not wanting in penetration, and he at first thought that the doorkeeper of the Rue d'Enfer had come to spy upon the house where the Marquis de Baffey resided. However, the presence of the young and handsome woman standing beside Master Bourdache was less easy to account for. She seemed to be on excellent terms with the rascal, and, in fact, they were talking earnestly and confidentially together.

Little *Æsop* was cautious, like all deformed persons. He realised, too, that the couple had not come there for nothing, and so, before taking any definite course, it was advisable that he should learn their purpose.

Instead of straightway confronting the questions and perhaps the repulses of the doorkeeper of this elegant mansion, he began to saunter along, pretending to be searching for something on the ground, in accordance with the usual habit of street Arabs.

His poor clothing, his humble air, and his hump, were all in accordance with the appearance which he wished to assume, and when he boldly stopped near Bourdache, the latter, not recognising him, took him for some rag-picker's child.

Kneeling down near the gutter, *Æsop* seemed to be looking for something in it; but, in point of fact, he did not lose a word of the conversation which was going on between Saint Privat's hireling and the beautiful *Clarisse*.

For it was *Clarisse*—the wayward, romantic damsel—who was now watching the door of the Marquis de Baffey's abode, under the protection of the husband of her father's cook.

"I told you, mademoiselle," said Bourdache, in a surly tone, "that your attempt would not succeed."

"Hold your tongue!" replied *Clarisse*, obstinately. "I will get in even if I stand here till to-morrow."

"But the doorkeeper drove me away, and declared that his master would not—in fact, could not—see any one whatever."

"He lied. His master is much better. He's almost quite well," asserted *Clarisse*. "Papa told me so yesterday."

"Your father, mademoiselle? You had better mention your father, indeed!" said Bourdache, in a grumbling tone. "If he knew what we were doing here, he would send me away to-night."

Clarisse shrugged her shoulders.

"Hold your tongue, I tell you!" she said again, in the same imperative way. "My father will reward you, for he is as anxious as I am that *Lucien* should be set free."

"I know nothing about all that," muttered Bourdache; "but I

know very well that your father has not said a word about all this since he came back from travelling, and that but for Madame Boutard's wild notions, you would never have taken it into your head to come and ask this Marquis de Baffey to get a pardon for the young officer."

"Madame Boutard behaves better than you do," rejoined Clarisse, in a firm tone. "She knows that I love Lucien Bellefond, and so she told me how to rescue him."

The romantic damsel, imbued with the far-fetched ideas of the time, fancied herself to be the heroine of her favourite romance, Madame Cotin's wonderful story, "Mathilde and Malek Adel." She was the tender and valiant Mathilde, and Lucien, of course, was the young Saracen warrior, pining in captivity.

"This is a pretty way, indeed, to rescue any one," said Bourdache; and he added sagaciously: "You do not know anything about your father's plans, and you may be upsetting them all. A thousand thunders! what a fool I must be to have let you coax me into coming here!"

"You have said enough," replied Bonnin's wilful heiress. "My father's plans are nothing to me, any more than that dowry which I have heard so much about, though I believe it is merely a myth."

Bourdache was about to reply, when the damsel clutched hold of his arm and pointed to the courtyard.

Two grooms were to be seen rubbing down a superb horse, and in the middle of the court a fine landau had now stopped, coming from the coach-house, and driven by a coachman in full livery.

Moreover, an old lady, escorted by two maids, was coming slowly down the steps of the mansion, no doubt with the intention of entering the showy vehicle.

This noble dame had a lofty air, in spite of her advanced age and old-fashioned dress. She indeed looked a little like the famous Madame de Maintenon.

"It is his aunt, I must speak to her," said Mademoiselle Clarisse impulsively.

Thereupon she darted into the courtyard without paying any heed to the doorkeeper, who, as he rushed out of his lodge to stop her, was only able to pounce upon Bourdache, whom he seized by the collar.

Æsop, who had heard all the talk, took advantage of this chance to slip into the yard and hide in a corner.

Meanwhile, Clarisse's bold conduct had already attracted the attention of the old lady, who stopped short, asking in a broken voice:

"What is it? what is it?"

And the question was natural on the part of this stately dowager, for the courtyard at that moment presented a most unusual appearance. A young girl of peculiar demeanour, running in and passing the doorkeeper, despite the latter's prohibition; a man of low

appearance, whom the said doorkeeper had seized by the collar; and a little beggar boy slipping between their legs to hide in a corner.

It was Clarisse who undertook to reply to the venerable dame's eager inquiry.

"Madame," said she, "are you not the Countess des Orgeries?"

The old lady, thus boldly accosted, drew herself up, and leaning upon her crutch-stick, looked fixedly at the damsel ere she coolly replied:

"What do *you* wish with the Countess des Orgeries?"

"I have a favour to ask of her," stammered Clarisse, who was utterly disconcerted.

"Very well; we will see to that presently; but let me tell you first of all, my lass, that a woman of my age and rank is not to be approached in this way."

Having thus spoken, the aged dame stiffened herself in her most imposing fashion.

"Pardon me, madame," responded M. Bonnin's heiress, "I asked your doorkeeper to let me see you indoors, but he refused to let me in."

"He did quite right. Who is that disreputable fellow who is struggling with him now?"

"He is my father's secretary."

"Your father has nice-looking secretaries, I must say!" said the countess. "That man looks like some convict escaped from the king's galleys. A nice secretary he must be!"

Then, calling out to the doorkeeper, she added: "Picard, put that fellow out into the street!"

This was already half accomplished, for Bourdache was no longer young, and, although strongly built, he was no match for the countess's retainer.

"Now, my beauty," quietly resumed Madame des Orgeries, taking a huge pinch of snuff from a very fine box, "I will listen to what you may have to say. I have no prejudices, mind; I belong to the school of Jean Jacques Rousseau, who used to come to see me dressed as an American, when he lived at Ermenonville, and I think that all men are equal. You are of low origin, that is quite evident, and there was an Orgeries at the First Crusade, but I do not pride myself upon my birth, and, in proof of that, I am now listening to you."

Far from encouraging Saint-Privat's daughter, this strange discourse completely confused her.

Clarisse was accustomed to do much as she liked in the Rue d'Enfer, and although now and then she had a tiff with her father and had to obey his behests, yet, as a general rule, she scouted all authority, as her duenna, the ex-goddess of reason, was well aware. Moreover, the romantic damsel had never previously been addressed by any one in the way that the dowager now spoke to her, and as she did not appreciate the prowess which the countess's ancestors had

displayed in Palestine, she was strongly tempted to give an impertinent answer. But, on the other hand, the old lady's manner awed her, let her think as she might, and thus her usually fluent tongue was paralysed.

Besides, she had come to ask a favour, so that this was certainly not the time to quarrel.

Her embarrassment finally touched Madame des Orgeries, who resumed in a more gentle way :

"Come, my dear, just explain yourself, and be brief. I am expected at the Baroness de Boisseant's card party."

"Well, madame," said Clarisse, in a faint voice, "I have come to ask you to use your influence to have a brave officer set at liberty."

"An officer? Ah! Ah! I'll venture to say that he served the Corsican ogre."

"He is, or rather he was, a lieutenant in the 25th Regiment of the Line. He resigned, however——"

"When the king returned, eh? I was sure of it. He has been imprisoned for conspiring against the legitimate government, I suppose? Just like all these Jacobins!"

"No, madame; it is for having killed a Prussian officer in a duel," answered Clarisse.

On hearing this the countess perceptibly changed in her manner.

"Ah! that is different," said she, "I hate the Prussians. Their great Frederick was merely a pretentious soldier, although he was so very intimate with my friend Monsieur de Voltaire, and if your lieutenant only has that little matter on his conscience——"

"I assure you that is all, madame."

"Very well; but why are you so greatly interested in this brigand of the Loire, for that is the right name for all Bonaparte's men?"

"Because I wish to marry him," replied Clarisse, without the slightest hesitation.

"That is a good reason, my girl, a very good reason, indeed, from your point of view, and I am glad that you speak out so plainly, but, as I myself am not in love with this fine soldier—I am past all that, and besides, I couldn't be in love with a commoner—why should I use my influence in his behalf?"

"Because he saved your nephew's life, madame," answered Clarisse, warmly. She had now recovered all her compromise.

"How was that?"

"Yes, madame; your nephew, the Marquis de Baffey, fell from his horse, and would have died on the spot had not Monsieur Lucien Bellefond, the officer in question, raised him up from the ground and brought him home here."

"Aha! I see! But tell me, my dear, how came you to know of what had happened to my nephew, the marquis?"

"My father told me."

"And he sent you here as an ambassadress, I presume?"

"No, madame, not at all; he is not even aware of what I am now doing."

"So you came on your own responsibility. That's not bad for a tradesman's daughter. I suppose your father is a tradesman?"

"I don't know," stammered the daughter of the ex-director of the dark room. She was only vaguely acquainted with her father's avocation and standing.

"No matter. I see no harm in a marriage between a girl of your class and an officer who has served the Corsican ogre. It is a very suitable kind of match," said the dowager, with a patronising air.

"Then, madame, may I hope——"

"You may, my child, you may," said the old lady in her patronising way. "I should already have rewarded the man who did Henri this service—Henri is my nephew, and he is quite well now; but he always told me that he did not know who it was that had helped him up. Now that I know the name, however, I will speak to Fouché about the matter, and he will not refuse my request, especially as he has just married into our set, and is trying to get into favour there, so that his impious vote at the National Convention may be forgotten."

"Oh, how good you are, madame!" exclaimed Clarisse, rapturously—she indeed felt inclined to spring at the old lady's neck to kiss her—"and how glad I should be to bring my father here to thank you!"

"I can dispense with that," replied the countess, abruptly. "Good-bye, my girl."

Thereupon she made a peremptory gesture, which signified that the interview was over, and which put an end to all Mademoiselle Bonnin's expressions of gratitude. Next, as soon as the old dame had got into her carriage, with an agility unusual at her age, the equipage left the court at a fast trot; and finally, Clarisse ran back to Bourdache, who was walking up and down the Rue de Varennes grumbling like a bear. In the first place, the doorkeeper's violence had hurt his feelings; and secondly, he did not at all approve of the step which Clarisse had taken.

During this singular conversation between the aristocratic dowager and the spy's daughter, the poor lame boy had remained crouching near the wall inside the yard.

He would have been glad to put in his own plea for Lucien, and if he did not throw himself at the dowager's feet, it was in a measure because he saw that the young girl was pleading the lieutenant's cause. Moreover, Madame des Orgeries' lofty manner had intimidated him to such a degree that he did not dare to stir, and then again, he realised that this handsome girl had an interest in the matter that was opposed to that of Thérèse Vernède.

The little humpback did not know Clarisse; but having seen her with the man who had so roughly seized hold of him at the door of the house in the Rue d'Enfer, he felt mistrustful respecting her.

His prudence did not advance his own affairs, however, as he had not seen the marquis ; and, in fact, he had little chance of seeing him. He did not even know whether M. de Baffey was in the house.

He began to ask himself whether he would not do as well to go off and renew his attempt on the morrow, when, unfortunately, one of the grooms who was rubbing down the horse saw him, and after abusing him, called to the doorkeeper to put him out. The other groom even flung a stone at him, but fortunately missed his aim.

So *Æsop*, seeing that all was over for that day, was about to turn and leave, when suddenly at the door of the house he espied a tall and handsome man, who was wearing a dressing-gown, and had his head bandaged up.

The poor humpback at once realised that heaven was helping him by sending M. de Baffey there. Now was the time, or never.

Æsop did not hesitate. Stopping short, he took off his cap, looking so entreatingly at the marquis, that the latter beckoned to him to come near.

"What do you wish with me, my boy?" said he, pleasantly, as soon as the humpback reached the foot of the steps.

"I wish to ask you to have Lieutenant Bellefond pardoned, sir," answered little *Æsop*.

"Lieutenant Bellefond, indeed?" rejoined the marquis, with unfeigned astonishment. "Did he send you here?"

"No, sir, he didn't, but I came because he is in prison for having fought a duel."

"That is very strange!" muttered Henri de Baffey, and then he resumed aloud: "But some one must have sent you? You surely didn't come of your own accord? What can you have to do with Lieutenant Bellefond?"

The humpback reflected for a moment, and finally he deemed it advisable to tell a falsehood. The end justified the means in this case.

"I came from a young lady who is going to marry Monsieur Bellefond," he timidly replied.

"Mademoiselle Vernède?"

"Yes, sir; that is her name."

"And you say that she sent you to ask me to plead for Monsieur Bellefond?" inquired the marquis.

"Yes, sir; I came from the Rue des Bourdonnais."

Henri de Baffey was greatly agitated, and although he said nothing, his eyes sparkled so strangely that poor *Æsop* drew back.

"Go and tell Mademoiselle Vernède that I have received her message, and that in three days' time I will bring her my answer," at last said the marquis.

The humpback realised that he was dismissed, and, without knowing whether he ought to rejoice or mourn, he bowed very low, and then, without more ado, ran off into the street,

XV.

THAT same day, while *Æsop* and buxom *Clarisse* were thus interceding for *Lucien Bellefond* with very different motives, our dear friend *Saint-Privat* suddenly fell like a bombshell into his snug retreat in the *Rue d'Enfer*.

He had made an appointment there with his faithful subordinate, the wary *Cornillon*, whom, for obvious reasons, he did not wish to receive at his house in the *Rue des Moineaux*.

He found him strolling about the grounds, smoking his pipe to while away the time, and, to his great surprise, he learned from his housekeeper and acolyte, the once beauteous *Madame Boutard*, that his dearly-cherished daughter had gone out an hour before with that scamp *Bourdache*, and had not said where she was going.

This escapade was calculated to alarm the ex-director of the dark room, for being well aware of his daughter's romantic proclivities, he keenly suspected that her absence had something to do with the handsome lieutenant, whose unfinished portrait was such a conspicuous object in the pavilion studio.

Like *Calypso*, who could not console herself for the departure of *Ulysses*, the buxom but susceptible *Mademoiselle Bonnin* had not known a moment's happiness since her dear invalid had so suddenly departed for an unknown destination.

Her father's varied explanations, compounded of commonplace fibs, with just the faintest sprinkling of veracity, had by no means satisfied her inquisitive mind and yearning heart, and during the old man's absence the majestic governess had had a great deal of trouble with her self-willed pupil.

The deserted young lady complained bitterly of her lonely surroundings, and even of her fond but reserved father. She declared that the whole household was deceiving her, and hiding from her what had really become of that handsome *Monsieur Bellefond*, whose abode she at least would have liked to know.

To tell the truth, the romantic *Clarisse* would not believe that the young ex-officer was insensible to her majestic charms, or that he had considered it quite a deliverance to leave the hospitable abode where he had been so carefully and affectionately tended.

Our ambitious acquaintance, *Saint-Privat*, had had neither the time nor the inclination to explain all this before starting on his journey to *Périgueux*, and the divine *Julie* vainly declared that the young man had left in accordance with all the most approved rules of society and propriety, adding that he would certainly reappear

when her father did. Clarisse would not listen to all this. She scouted it, indeed, as the height of improbability, and after a series of unpleasant scenes, threatened to take some bold step herself.

Fortunately, Madame Boutard, who made up for her lack of authority by an artfulness which would have done credit to a diplomatist, succeeded in quieting the strong-willed girl till Saint-Privat's return. But alas ! the ex-director of the dark room merely brought back some promises to his daughter, promises which he certainly did not hesitate to make, saying that he would soon bring Lucien to her, and that he would even speedily lead her to the altar ; however, he still avoided telling her anything with regard to the sudden disappearance and present whereabouts of the handsome officer.

The inflammable Clarisse, who had inherited a fair share of the parental cunning, pretended to believe all this ; and thus her father was greatly surprised when he heard that she had gone out that morning and taken that watch-dog, Bourdache, with her.

However, he knew very well how to conceal his feelings whenever anything serious was the matter, and he was now extremely anxious to have a chat with Cornillon.

He thought to himself that Clarisse would scarcely do anything imprudent, the more so as Bourdache was with her ; and, after all, it might be that she had merely gone out for some harmless purpose, and would soon return.

After easing his feelings by lecturing everybody, including the governess, who took his remonstrances in very good part, our wary friend went to join Cornillon in the garden.

Saint-Privat had not had time to see his acolyte again on the same day as he interviewed Maxime Trimoulac with such decisive results, for the visit to the Rue de la Grange-Batelière had lasted a long time, and, as Cornillon had had to attend to his duties in the Rue de Jérusalem, he had left the Rue d'Enfer, despite Bourdache's opposition.

Saint-Privat was now very anxious to consult him as to what he ought to do ; and, indeed, it was now very evident that matters must speedily be brought to a termination.

" Well ! " called the ex-director of the dark room, as soon as he caught sight of his assistant, " you know that there are fine goings-on here ? "

The detective rose up, took his pipe from his mouth, made a kind of military salute, and then said, respectfully :

" I have heard that the young lady has gone out without permission. "

" Yes, indeed ! Can you understand such behaviour as that, Cornillon ? " exclaimed the tender father, raising his hands to heaven ; " a child for whom I have sacrificed everything, for whom I have denied myself so much—the apple of my eye, the one thought of my life ! Dear me ! Dear me ! Ah ! how ungrateful children are ! "

"Don't be put out, sir," said Cornillon, by way of setting his patron's mind at rest. "She must have gone to the Luxembourg to take the air."

"Not with Bourdache, surely? Why should she go with him to the promenade?"

"It is true that Bourdache does not look much like a lady's companion," replied the detective, with a sneer. "Who knows, however? She may be running after the officer."

"Impossible! She plagued me so much with questions about him, that yesterday, to make her keep quiet, I told her that he was in prison, and that I hoped to get him set free very shortly."

"And is that all she knows about it?" asked Cornillon, who seemed struck by this reply.

"Yes, unless Julie has told her anything else," answered Saint-Privat, somewhat testily.

"I remember that Madame Boutard was there the other day when I was telling you the story about the meeting between the Marquis de Baffey and the lieutenant, the former's accident and the latter's arrest. I learned all that at the 'house,' you know."

"Well, Julie declares to me that she told her nothing, but I doubt it. Ah! what a nuisance the women are! Let us leave all that, however. I have serious anxieties on another subject, and I wish to consult you. Do you know where Zenobia's niece is?"

"You told me something the other day about her, but you did not tell me much," replied Cornillon, pulling at his pipe with a phlegmatic air.

"That was no fault of mine. You were in a great hurry. Fortunately, we can talk at our ease to-day. And, indeed, I have a lot to tell you about this affair."

"Oh, yes! we have plenty of time; I have got three days' leave, and you can do as you like with me, sir. Happy I am to serve you."

"Thanks; I will keep you with me; but let me begin. At the interview I had with Trimoulac in the Rue de la Grange-Batelière, the fool let the cat out of the bag without suspecting it. It was he who unwittingly put me on poor Virginie's track. It was she who was kidnapped at the house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt—kidnapped by Freemasons—taken into a deserted quarry at Montmartre—and there walled up alive in a pillar supporting the vault."

"The deuce take me if I ever should have thought of such a thing!" exclaimed Cornillon. "It was a strange idea to wall up a woman alive! Who ever heard of such doings?"

"We hear something new every day. It is, however, vexatious that the colonel's will should have been buried with her; for such I really believe to be the case," said Saint-Privat.

"And it must be so, as she brought this will to Paris with her, and did not give it to any one—at least, we have no knowledge of her having done so. This will must be somewhere, that's clear."

"Of course ; and do you think that I ought to give up all hope of securing it ?" asked the ex-director of the dark room.

"No, certainly not. At least I, if I had the hope of making a fortune, would hunt for this will even in the sea itself sooner than renounce the hope of obtaining it."

"It is much easier to talk about it than to do it," muttered Saint-Privat, sagaciously. He was in a thoughtful mood.

"That may be ; but we can try," replied Cornillon. "It would be absurd to let the thing go without making an effort."

"It is my intention to have a try, especially as other people may have the same intention."

Cornillon looked up in some surprise. He had never dreamt of this contingency.

"Who do you mean ?" he asked.

"Trimoulac, in the first place."

"Why, I thought that he did not know the great secret. I imagined—of course I may be mistaken—still the inference I drew from your words was that he did not suspect that the man who was walled up at Montmartre on the 2nd July and the sutler's niece were one and the same person."

"He certainly did not appear to suspect this while I was talking with him," replied Saint-Privat, "but he is a very cunning fellow—of that there can be no doubt—and after I left him, he may have remembered something which I imprudently let out."

"What was that ?"

"That Virginie Lasbaysses came to Paris attired as a young man," answered the old spy, with a grimace implying self-dissatisfaction.

"The devil ! he may think of it. That's certain," rejoined Cornillon, with a gesture of alarm.

"And with the influence that he possesses with Fouché, he has a thousand ways of obtaining whatever information he may want. He will make inquiries, and if he finds out the truth, he will lose no time in acting."

"I agree with you so far as that goes, but we can get ahead of him," answered Cornillon, promptly.

Saint-Privat was about to say something else when, on looking up in an abstracted way, he suddenly caught sight of Clarisse coming down the gravel-walk.

His presumptive heiress ran forward ; her blooming cheeks and her bright eyes seemingly indicated that she had some important and pleasant news to tell.

Bourdache followed in the rear, but without evincing any alacrity. Indeed, he looked like a dog who has stolen his master's dinner and expects to be beaten for doing so.

"He will soon be pardoned !" called out Mademoiselle Bonnin, without any other preamble, when she was still a dozen paces distant from her father.

"Whom are you talking about?" demanded Saint-Privat, knitting his brows.

"Why, Lucien of course," answered the wilful damsel. "Madame Boutard told me that he had saved the life of an important person, and——"

"Madame Boutard knows more than I do, then," replied the old spy, with a gesture of suppressed rage; "but she is a fool, and she will soon hear from me."

"You may do as you like," replied Clarisse, disrespectfully; "but you cannot prevent the fact that the Countess des Orgeries, who is received at court, will speedily set her nephew's saviour at liberty."

"Oh, women, women!" growled the old man, stamping with rage. These tidings, indeed, were altogether too much for him.

In fact, becoming quite infuriated, he cried, in a loud tone:

"This is all very well, but I cannot talk with you now, and I wish you to go to your room and remain there till I call you."

"I am no longer of an age to be sent to my room like a child," replied the young lady with a savage glow in her eyes, and a still more heightened colour in her cheeks. "All the same, however, I don't care, now that I am sure of seeing Lucien again."

Thereupon, turning her back upon her father, she sauntered leisurely towards the house.

"Go into your hole, now!" called out Saint-Privat, addressing Bourdache, and shaking his fist at him. The miserable hireling had in the meanwhile stood there with an uneasy, hang-dog expression of countenance.

Without a word the doorkeeper turned on his heels, and still hanging his head, betook himself off to his quarters.

"Well," said the detective to his employer, as soon as the others had gone, "you may believe me or not, but I thought that this would happen. Ah! it's a great pity, but young people have such a way of their own! Your young lady learnt all this about Monsieur de Baffey from Madame Boutard, and, being in love with the lieutenant, she went direct to Baffey to ask him to help her lover."

"And that fool of a marquis promised to do as she asked! Well, what do you say to that?" said Saint-Privat.

"I should say that it is yet another reason for your making haste to find the will."

"And that is what I want to do. Ah! if wishing were all that were required, I——"

"We must act."

"Act! How?"

"It is very simple. The girl and the will are in one of the quarries at the Butte Montmartre, are they not? I understood you to say so, at all events."

"Yes. At least, so Trimolac said."

"It must be true, for he had no interest in lying at the time," remarked Cornillon, sagaciously.

"It is at all events probable. But even if it is all correct, I don't see that it helps me."

"Why not? Come, sir, a quick-witted man like you must see the advantage. That scamp Trimoulac told you what you did not know before in spite of the trouble you had taken. You have been searching for two months, searching in vain for a treasure, and now that ass has told you where it is."

"He did not tell me how to get at it."

"Really, sir, you could hardly expect him to tell you how to rob himself," said the facetious Cornillon, with a touch of irony which was natural enough under the circumstances. "Besides, between ourselves, it seems to me that he has told you quite enough to enable you to supplant him."

"I do not see that he has," muttered Saint-Privat, who quite failed to understand what his acolyte was aiming at.

"Well, sir, did he tell you where the entrance to the famous quarry was?" asked Cornillon, after a moment's reflection.

"Yes," replied the ex-director of the dark room. "He said that it was possible to get into it, on the right side of the height, near the Chaussée de Clignancourt. The passage is hidden by some brambles, he stated."

"Those brambles will not prevent you from finding it," remarked the subordinate spy. "So nothing can be easier than to enter the cavern where the treasure is."

"Easier! I don't see that."

"Good heavens, sir, I don't understand you! Come, come, you were much more sagacious when there were no millions to find. Why, didn't that good Chevalier de Loupiac also let out that the victim of the masons was walled up in one of the pillars that hold up the vault of the cavern?"

Cornillon paused again, fully expecting that his worthy patron would now grasp his meaning and reply accordingly.

But Saint-Privat's answer was most disappointing.

"He did not tell me which one," said he.

"That would have been asking too much," was Cornillon's prompt retort, "especially as he does not know which one himself—at least in all probability he doesn't. But this ought not to hinder you. There are not so many pillars, I presume, to puzzle one. Besides, a body takes up a deal of room, and the masonry over the orifice cannot yet be dry. You could easily find the place."

"Well, what then?" demanded Clarisse's father, speaking with evident hesitation.

"Why, you can handle a pickaxe, can't you, sir. The plaster will yield easily enough, and you will soon disclose the body. The rest is nothing; you must search the victim's pockets till you find the paper. It will be in one of them, sure enough!"

"It is a horrible task," replied Saint-Privat, who could not help shuddering at the idea of the scheme which his acolyte had propounded.

"Pah! a million is not to be got without a little trouble, any more than an omelet can be made without breaking the eggs." And thereupon Cornillon quietly chuckled at his own wit.

"Then you think that we must go and dig the will out?" asked the ex-director of the dark room.

"I do not see any other way, unless you expect the will to come to you. And that it can't do. Remember what Mahomet said, sir, 'If the mountain won't come to me, I must go to the mountain.' And even as it is, you must make haste over the job."

"Oh! a will in a dead woman's pocket cannot fly away," replied Saint-Privat.

"No, but it may be taken away before you get there, as you yourself suggested only just now."

"Yes, by Trimoulac. I'm aware of that," said the ex-director of the dark room, with a sigh.

"By Trimoulac, certainly. You let out the secret of the niece's disguise. That was enough, I'm sure of it—I know him: he is extremely cunning. He will compare his information with what you revealed to him, and will soon draw the conclusion that you spoke of just now. Now the chevalier isn't merely quick-witted; he is also a man of quick action, and as soon as he comes to the said conclusion he will set to work, I'll wager. And mark this, he will hasten all the more because he knows you to be a competitor of his. He knows that you are looking for his uncle's will to sell it to some one else; you told him so yourself—or, at all events, you said something of the kind."

Saint-Privat sat there with a crestfallen expression of countenance. He had abundant cause for feeling dissatisfied.

"I begin to think that I said too much," he said, after a short pause, which he spent in meditation.

"He was able to see that you are a man of ability," resumed Cornillon; "he knows, too, that you are a man to understand a mere hint, and he will have realised that the story of the quarry did not pass unobserved by you. Consequently his conclusions will be that you will try to turn that story to account, and with that idea in his head, he will not let you outstrip him."

"All this is only too likely."

"And if Lucien Bellefond should hear of all this, he would be one adversary the more," remarked Cornillon, who seemed to be unusually sagacious that day.

"It is impossible that he should ever hear of it," protested Saint-Privat. "Who could tell him of the fate of Virginie Lasbaysses?"

"Her Aunt Zenobia, of course; at least she can say that Virginie is dead. I am even surprised that she has not done so already."

It is true that she does not know Bellefond's address, but she may find it out any day."

"She does not know how to write."

"She can find some one to write for her, or she can come to Paris herself. Do not delay matters, sir. I assure you, by all that's holy, that you have not a moment to lose, if you do not wish to lose the will."

Saint-Privat felt all the force of his assistant's reasoning, and hung his head as if overwhelmed by the weight of the situation. He indeed found himself in a peculiarly trying position. The precious will now seemed so near and yet so far. This arch intriguer had a dread of violence, and it had occurred to him that if he ventured into that old quarry of Montmartre, among the bats and reptiles that possibly dwelt therein, he might be pounced upon by those mysterious Brethren of the Trowel, tied up in a sack, and treated to the same fate as Zenobia Capitaine's luckless messenger. This prospect filled him with horror. And yet, on the other hand, his longing to obtain possession of the will was more acute than ever; so acute, indeed, that at last he partially overcame his fears.

"It is impossible for me to accomplish this thing alone," he muttered.

"We can both undertake the job if you like," said Cornillon, setting aside his pipe, which he had finished smoking during Saint-Privat's meditation.

"Would you really consent——"

"To help you? Of course I would! I never shrink from work," replied the detective, with alacrity.

"Well, my old friend," answered Saint-Privat, with a faint show of something approaching emotion, "I will accept your offer."

"You are right, sir! I am glad you have come to that decision. Something tells me that we shall succeed if we do not delay too long."

"Be tranquil. I am as eager as you are," said Saint-Privat, visibly brightened by the prospect of having Cornillon's assistance. "When shall we begin?"

"When, master? Why not to-night?" was the subordinate's ready reply.

"To-night, then. But tell me, what is your idea as to how we ought to begin."

"Well, as to that, I will go this afternoon and walk about the Butte near the entrance, which I might have some little trouble in finding by night. When I've ascertained the position of the entrance, I will supply myself with the necessary tools, some pick-axes, shovels, and dark-lanterns. You may leave all that to me. I know all about such things, and I can promise you that proper implements will be chosen."

"Very well. Where shall we meet?" asked the ex-director of the dark room, after nodding his approval.

"On the esplanade at the foot of the Butte Montmatre. That's the best place, I fancy."

"At what time?"

"At ten exactly. We should, otherwise, be exposed to meeting people near the entrance; and if we wait till it grows later we might not have time to finish our work before daylight. I hope that it won't be a difficult job; still, there's no telling, and we must look out for all contingencies."

"I agree with you. But suppose we find any one inside the cavern," said Saint-Privat, slowly; and at this suggestion, although he himself made it, he could not control a nervous shudder.

"Any of the masons? There is no danger of that, sir," promptly replied Cornillon, shaking his head. "You yourself have stated that the chevalier says they no longer go there, knowing they are betrayed."

"But what of the chevalier himself? What if he has had the same idea as we have, of going there to-night?" asked Saint-Privat in no little trepidation.

"It is not likely that he will do so. But we had better take a pair of pistols with us. I shall do so, and I advise you to do the same. Like that, we shall be prepared for all emergencies."

"I will; but, after all, for such a hazardous expedition as this, three men would be better than two. What if we took——"

"Whom?"

"Why, Bourdache, of course. I know no one else whom I could trust," replied the old spy.

"You know him better than I do, sir," said Cornillon, with a pout; "but all I can say is that your Bourdache does not suit me. He marks badly, as we say at the 'house.' By the by, did he ever belong to it?"

"No, indeed. On the contrary," answered Saint-Privat, with a faint smile.

"On the contrary? I don't quite understand what you mean, sir."

"Yes, he is a fellow with a bad record," answered the ex-director of the dark room. "I got him out of his trouble, but I have kept proofs enough to have his head cut off if ever he played me a trick."

"That is something, but it might be a reason for his wishing to get rid of you," remarked the sententious Cornillon.

"No. His record is in a safe place, and I have warned him that if he ever ventured to play me false, some one would bring certain papers before the officers of the law, of whom he stands in wholesome terror."

"Oh, if that's the case, sir, I have nothing more to say, and I'll wager a thousand francs that to-morrow, by this time, you'll have the will in your pocket. Ha! ha! We shall manage it beautifully. All the chances are in our favour."

"It will be thanks to you if we succeed, my old friend, and I assure you that you will not find me ungrateful."

"I trust to your generosity, sir. But the young lady, after all, did not act so badly in going to ask for the lieutenant's pardon, for if he should remain in prison you could not conclude the bargain that will give you the million."

"True," replied Saint-Privat, with a shrug of the shoulders; "it is not certain that he will be pardoned, however; but, be that as it may, I shall find some means of communicating with him. His situation is not a very serious one, as Trimoulac has not yet denounced him as a conspirator. The scamp is keeping that back as a final stroke of policy."

"I'm afraid he will denounce him before long."

"Bah! the marquis will certainly intercede for Bellefond, who rendered him such an important service; and besides, when it is known that Bellefond has a million of money, it will not be believed that he is a very dangerous conspirator."

"I did not think of that. You are right, master. To conspire, a man should be very poor. Now I'm off for the Butte Montmartre," said Cornillon, rising up and settling his hat on his head.

"And I will talk to Bourdache, so as to prepare him properly for our expedition."

"At ten o'clock, then."

"At ten o'clock," repeated Saint-Privat, graciously holding out his hand to his valued assistant.

Then the two arch-intriguers parted; and, while Cornillon was going away with a brisk stride, the father of the wayward Clarisso remarked to himself:

"I hope that it is not too late."

XVI.

THAT same eventful day, and at the very time when the artful Saint-Privat was talking with the cunning Cornillon as to the manner of conducting the necessary operations for finding the colonel's will, Maxime Trimoulac, otherwise the "Chevalier de Loupiac," was conferring in the boudoir of the Baroness de Sainte Gauburge with a robust-looking man, with an evil expression of countenance, who looked very much out of place on the silken sofa where he had seated himself beside Fouché's dashing detective.

The little occasional table was laden with cordials, as on the afternoon when the ex-director of the dark room had paid his memorable visit, but the ill-dressed individual now hobnobbing with Lucien's cousin drank a great deal more than Clarisse's father had done. It must also be admitted that Trimoulac kept up with him, and even touched glasses with him at every bumper, for he was not at all proud, the exercise of his functions as a detective having made him indifferent as to all social distinctions. He was as much at home in the lowest drinking den of the slums of Paris, on the look-out for a Jacobin conspirator, as in the drawing-room of an ambassador, mentally taking note of such political information as might fall from the lips of some inexperienced diplomatist.

Moreover, the man whom he made so welcome on the present occasion had long been his companion and equal in the hierarchy of the Rue de Jérusalem, and Loupiac, when he had reached the top of the ladder as a spy, had remained faithful to the friend who was still on one of the lower rungs.

If Tranquebar, as this veteran police agent was called, had not advanced, it was because he lacked steadiness, for he had every other requisite for the calling he followed.

He was as strong as Samson, as brave and as unscrupulous as Mandrin; he was also faithful to his masters, let them be whom they might, and he never discussed their orders. Unquestioning obedience was his motto, and he set to work at once, no matter what were the orders given him.

Under Rovigo, in Napoleon's time, he would not have hesitated to arrest a marshal had occasion required it, and under Fouché, now Louis XVIII.'s Minister of Police, he would not have shrunk from arresting an archbishop, great as had become the power and the prestige of the clergy.

Unfortunately, this model satellite had two slight faults—he drank and he gambled. It is true that, as a rule, he did not stagger when

he was intoxicated, but on certain occasions he had been overcome in his daily struggles with brandy, and these accidental failings of his had given him a bad name. Besides, regularly at the beginning of every month he lost nine-tenths of his pay at some low gambling-table, and this it was that made him look so shabby, for he never had enough funds to array himself in becoming attire.

The Baroness de Sainte-Gauburge's maid had shut the door in his face the first time that he had asked to see Loupiac, and the chevalier had been obliged to give positive orders so that he might be allowed to enter Zoé's elegant rooms.

Thus, for the past few days, he had been admitted without demur, and, indeed, on the last occasion the fair baroness herself had deigned to say a few pleasant words to him, for the question now was to save a fortune. Saint-Privat, foolish at times despite all his well-trained acumen, had let out too much, and Trimoulac had guessed everything. The spurious chevalier no longer doubted but what Zenobia Capitaine's niece had perished in his place, and that she had his uncle's missing will in favour of Lucien Bellefond about her.

Once on the track he had guessed the subtle plans of his competitor, the mealy-mouthed gentleman with the gold spectacles, and he understood that the old rascal now knew as much as he himself did. However, instead of losing his time in bewailing his own folly in having spoken of Virginie's walling-up, he at once made ready to seize upon the will.

In fact, while Clarisse's father—surprised by the sudden change in the situation—was still deliberating, Trimoulac, like a man of mettle, was acting. He had already made two visits to Montmartre, while Saint-Privat, poor old soul, was still arranging for his first trip there with the faithful Cornillon.

"And so, my old Tranquebar," said the chevalier, pouring his companion a glassful of rare old brandy, "you think that we shall get through it all to-night?"

"Certainly I do," replied the herculean Tranquebar; "I'm sure that we shall. We had deuced bad luck in having to search six pillars without finding the right one. It is true that for some time past I have had no luck at all. I have been eight days without winning a copper at cards, confound it!"

"Bah! you'll do better, old man! At cards, as in all things, perseverance is the main thing. And to help you to be all right with the croupiers, here is some new ammunition," added Loupiac, handing his acolyte a roll of twenty-five napoleons.

Tranquebar's eyes flashed, and snatching hold of the roll, he exclaimed:

"Good! you understand what life is, and no mistake! You know how to oblige a friend without lecturing him. That's the right way to act."

"I do not understand lecturing," answered Trimoulac, with a

smile. "And now, my dear friend, to business. You have not seen anything suspicious, inside or out, have you?"

"Nothing whatever," answered Tranquebar. "Besides, I didn't fear anything. In that neighbourhood, folks all go to bed with the fowls, and at nightfall there's not a soul to be seen. Now that I know the way, I go into the quarries just as though I were going home. I have never met any one at all suspicious near the height. As for the interior, there's no danger of any one going there. I work away there as quietly as in a workshop."

"Good! All the same, though, we must finish the work as soon as possible, and before we encounter some one else looking for the treasure. It would be uncommonly unpleasant if any one came interfering with us, or simply prying on us in the quarry."

"Oh! if any one should poke his nose inside the quarry while we are at work there, I'll undertake to dispatch him pretty quickly, and wall him up as neatly as though I were a mason myself."

Thereupon Tranquebar, glancing with quiet pride at his muscular form, indulged in a grim chuckle.

"That would be amusing, no doubt," said Trimoulac, with a sneering laugh, "but I prefer to avoid having recourse to violence. I have my reasons for that. Besides, I should like to see that old fool's face when he gets to the cavern and finds the pillars opened and the birds flown."

"You *can* see it if you like," answered Tranquebar, at this moment raising his glass and eyeing the brandy with the glance of a connoisseur.

"No. It would be imprudent to attempt that," responded the chevalier, who, like his competitor, Saint-Privat, seemed to be a peaceable kind of man, fonder of smooth villainy than of bandit tactics. "No, when I have got hold of the will I shall burn it, and we will go away. When a man is a millionaire, it is best for him to avoid compromising himself, and I shall be more than a millionaire, my friend."

"But I shall not," said Tranquebar, curtly, and with a somewhat gloomy look.

"I know what you mean, my dear fellow," responded Maxime with an easy air, "and I have not forgotten what I promised you; six thousand francs a year, in monthly instalments, as long as you live, and meals with me once a week."

"And we shall always have some of this same brandy, I hope. Fine stuff it is, and no mistake," remarked the bibulous detective.

"As much as you like, my dear fellow, and there will be perquisites also—little presents, and so on—you know me, and you know that I am not mean. Whenever you are not lucky at cards, why then, you understand——"

"That is enough, Loupiac," exclaimed Tranquebar, squeezing his

patron's hand with his huge fingers. "Between us a life-long friendship commences from this time forth."

"I believe you. But I say, tell me, don't you think that we had better begin earlier to-night?"

"I shall be there at nine."

"Very good. Then I will join you at half-past nine. I do not wish to have to return to that horrible cavern after to-night. Let's finish with it as speedily as possible."

"It is your fault that we have been obliged to go there three times all to no purpose. You could not find the right place, and I have had to do a great deal of pickaxe work for nothing. It's trying, strong as one may be, I can tell you."

"You had better say that it is the fault of that confounded investigating magistrate who has been questioning Cyrille."

"You mean Cyrille the mason, I presume?" said Tranquebar, who, without waiting for any invitation on his friend's part, now poured himself out another glass of brandy.

"Yes, the fellow who recognised me, and who, thinking me dead, was so taken aback, that with a little pressure he betrayed his associates to me. I thought that I had done wonders in lodging him in the prison of La Force to prevent him from talking. I even agreed with him about it, and he let himself be arrested willingly, under the pretext that he was mixed up in some ridiculous sort of plot against the safety of the State. Between ourselves, my dear fellow, I think that he was glad to be put out of the way, for he ran the risk, you know, of being stabbed by some of his good friends, the masons, who already suspected him of having betrayed them. Well, I got him into the prison, and everything was going on well. I was quite delighted; I saw the fellow whenever I wished, and I intended to ask him about the precise position of the pillar in which the man who was captured at my house was walled up. But then, confound it, the public prosecutor must needs take up the matter, just by way of showing his zeal. All these fellows want to make a great display of loyalty just now. Then, to make matters worse, a very zealous investigating magistrate is chosen. It's always like that after a change of government!"

"You are quite right," said Tranquebar, nodding his head as if to accentuate his approval.

"Well, Cyrille was placed in strictly secret confinement. Even I was not allowed to communicate with him. I went to Fouché to obtain permission to see him. But I could not even see his excellency, for he has recently married a nobleman's daughter, and there's no getting near him. He's become as stuck-up as he used to be familiar. And this is why Cyrille could not tell me where to find the right pillar. A man cannot think of everything, you know, and after what happened here only the other day to that old swine, there was no time to be lost. I was in a desperate hurry. Well, I went to find you to propose a bold stroke. You agreed, and you have

been working at it like a slave ever since the day before yesterday. However, after all, there has only been a little delay, and we have nearly reached our aim."

"That's certain," replied Tranquebar, "for there is only one more pillar to attack, and if the body that you are looking for isn't inside that one, why your man, Cyrille, must have lied."

"Oh! the body is there. But you are not drinking," added Maxime, and then, replenishing both the glasses once more, he said: "Your health, Tranquebar!"

"Yours, old man!" answered the burly detective. "I must say that those masons are terrible fellows to deal with. Seven bodies already found by me, and another that remains to be dug out, make a pretty collection."

"Yes; the production of those eight corpses would suffice to send the whole gang to the scaffold," replied Trimoulac, shrugging his shoulders.

"And that you intend to do, I suppose?"

"Bah! I don't know," answered the heir-at-law. "I shall soon be rich, you see, and I long to retire from the service to enjoy myself. I've well earned the right to do so. And so I may not say anything about these people and their affairs unless I think it absolutely indispensable to get rid of Lieutenant Bellefond. I have not yet denounced him as an accomplice of the Grand Mason, but as it is always as well to be on the safe side, I will attend to him tomorrow, when I have burned my uncle's previous will."

At this moment the door curtain was raised, and a gaily-attired lady, a very pronounced brunette, appeared upon the threshold of the room.

Tranquebar, who was somewhat afraid of the baroness—for this was she—rose up as though he had a spring inside of him, made a military salute, and took up his hat to go.

Loupiac, who was aware that the baroness wished to speak to him privately, did not attempt to detain his pal, and so the two confederates parted, after exchanging the significant words:

"To night, then!"

XVII.

THE clock of the church of Saint-Eustache, overlooking the central markets of Paris—then very different from what they are to-day—was striking ten at night. Saint-Privat must now be at the foot of the Butte Montmartre, on the esplanade of which the trusty Cornillon was waiting, while Trimoulac must already be inside the cavern with his herculean assistant, Tranquebar.

At a stone's throw from Saint-Eustache, in the office of the Rue des Bourdonnais, Vernède, the banker, sat talking with Timoléon Machefer. They both wore long military-looking coats, and heavy sticks rested against their chairs.

In a corner there were two pickaxes and two torches, such objects as the clerks of the house have never beheld in their master's private office.

The banker was looking very grave, but his friend's cheerful face was the same as ever. It still bore that pleasant, open, frank expression which made everybody in the neighbourhood like him.

A faint light fell upon them from the shaded lamp resting on the table, and it was easy to see that they were not talking of business affairs. Indeed, their conversation had reference to the very matters that had for some days engrossed the attention of Saint-Privat and Maxime Trimoulac. That may seem strange, as strange as the presence of the pickaxes and torches in that room where, as a rule, ledgers, pens, and papers, were the more conspicuous objects.

"Then you still think that this may prove a useful expedition?" said Thomas Vernède to his friend.

"It is the only chance that Lucien now has, and that you have," replied Machefer, promptly. He was never deaf in the banker's society.

"If it were only for me I should not go."

"I believe that, for I know you," said the provision dealer, "but your daughter's happiness depends upon the success of the attempt. It is well to remember that."

"Not her happiness. Riches are not happiness," replied Vernède, after the fashion of an eighteenth-century philosopher of Rousseau's school.

"Theoretically you are right," observed Machefer; "but if Thérèse marries Lucien Bellefond, and he be without any money, while you leave none to your daughter, what will become of them both?"

"Thérèse would then have to work like her mother, who was as poor as myself when I married her."

"Your daughter would certainly have the courage to do so; and Bellefond is energetic and intelligent enough to make his way; but it is none the less certain that their lot would be very different if he inherited Colonel Lacaussade's millions, which are lawfully his."

"I should have preferred it if he had earned the money," answered Vernède, whose mind that evening seemed full of abstract notions of moral philosophy.

"So should I, for he would have it then," responded the practical-minded provision dealer. "Whereas, in the present situation, he has not got it, at least as yet. However, my dear friend, just look at the matter as it really is. Your daughter, as you are well aware, does not wish to marry any one, save Lucien; and if she does not marry him she will simply die of sorrow. I am not exaggerating, and I have not the slightest desire to cause you any unnecessary pain. But the facts speak for themselves. Thérèse's health has already suffered since Bellefond's imprisonment."

"That is only too true," answered Thomas Vernède, heaving a deep sigh.

"On the other hand you, my old friend, after twenty years of honest toil, are seemingly about to lose the fruit of your labours. This misfortune, should it really happen, would be an irreparable one. At your age a man has not time to make a fortune over again, even if he has enough will and energy left him."

"I should not try to do so," replied Vernède, in a gloomy voice, which fully indicated how distressed he was at heart.

"That may be; you might resign yourself to ruin, but—forgive me for reminding you of the sad truth my friend—you must also file your schedule; in short, failure is at the end of it all."

"And failure is dishonour. I am aware of that," said Thomas Vernède, bitterly. "I had hoped to avoid it, but I have met with fresh disasters during the last two months. When I have repaid the Marquis de Baffey those three hundred thousand francs which he deposited with me, I shall not have enough to meet my engagements for the end of this month."

"You are resolved to pay those three hundred thousand francs, I presume?" asked Machefer.

"Oh! I would rather die a thousand times than remain in the power of that insolent fellow, Baffey."

"Well, to-day is the 9th September," said Machefer; "if I am not mistaken, the payment must be made the day after to-morrow at noon, or thereabouts."

"Yes, the money is ready."

"But didn't you also tell me that you had a heavy payment to make to-morrow?"

"Yes, to my correspondent at Havre. I had been notified of it, but I wrote back asking him not to draw upon me till the 25th. Be-

tween now and then something may come in. I have had business with that banker for a very long time, and our connection has been too pleasant a one for him to refuse my request."

"You have taken a wise precaution," rejoined the provision dealer, approvingly. "In a fortnight's time from now Bellefond will be recognised as the colonel's heir; and as he is your partner, your firm will triumph over all its worries, for when once Lucien is admitted to be a millionaire, he will have no difficulty in raising the needful ready money. You see, my dear Thomas, that first of all, in fact before and above everything else, we must help your nephew to establish his claims."

"Yes, I know that you are right, and that it is my duty to go in search of this inheritance which will enrich my daughter's affianced suitor; and yet the idea of this search fills me with repugnance. Why does not he undertake it himself?"

"Bellefond?" ejaculated Machefer, in amazement. "How on earth can he do so when he is in prison?"

"He will not stay there for ever. We have had reason to fear that he might be implicated in a plot; but the conspiracy of the masons has not been discovered, or we should certainly have heard of it. In fact, if the association were threatened we should have been pounced upon already. Lucien is accused of the duel only, and however severe the king's magistrates may be, they cannot keep him in prison long for such a matter as that."

Thomas Vernède no doubt considered that these remarks of his were to the point, and justified his own repugnance to search for the missing will; but his friend Machefer was not of that opinion, as his answer clearly showed.

"Well, I admit that he may be released in a month, or in a fortnight even, if you like," said the provision dealer, "but that scamp Trimoulac will have had time to find the will a dozen times over."

"How can he know where it is?" asked the banker, who did not consider this to be at all a likely contingency.

"Must I tell you again what Vannier told me?" rejoined Machefer; "you know Vannier very well. He was one of the men who carried the sack on the night of——"

"Yes, yes, I know, I know," said Vernède, with the hastiness of a man who wishes to avoid having a painful subject mentioned. And painful indeed was this one to him; for since he had seen the so-called Chevalier de Loupiac in the flesh, he knew that a fatal mistake had been made on the night when for the last time he had officiated as Grand Master in the old quarry of the Butte Montmartre.

"Well, Vannier was under Brother Cyrille's orders that night," continued Machefer, unrelentingly, and, indeed, he had serious reasons for insisting. "Now Vannier, as well as you, has quite recently come upon the Chevalier de Loupiac, whom we all believed to be dead. Whom did he meet him with? Why, with that very

Cyrille, about whose treachery there can be no doubt. From all this it is evident that Trimoulac, who calls himself Loupiac, must know what was done with the unfortunate person who was captured in his place in the house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt."

For a moment Vernède seemed at a loss for a reply. Then, with some little hesitation he answered: "That does not prove, however, that he knows that this person was the unfortunate girl——"

"Whom Zenobia Capitaine had sent to Paris to deliver Lacausade's will to Lucien Bellefond. How on earth can you say that?" protested Machefer, indignantly. "Have you forgotten what I told you when I came back from Périgueux? Surely your memory cannot be so bad as all that. Did I not have proof, proof positive, that the scoundrel had written to the sutler-woman towards the end of the month of June, telling her to come to Paris; that he had signed this letter with Lucien Bellefond's name; and that, in this letter, he made an appointment at his house with this woman? She, mind, went to Paris wearing men's clothes. Now, having heard of the kidnapping, it is quite impossible for us to suppose that he has failed to think that it was Virginie Lasbaysses who was seized upon in his place and walled up in——"

"Enough, enough, I believe you now," replied the banker, who would never let his friend finish any allusion to the terrible affair of Montmartre.

"Well, then," resumed the provision dealer, energetically, and tapping the floor with his stick as if to give additional force to his words, "well, then, if you believe me, you will offer no further objections to the plan which I propose. To leave the colonel's will to the wretched spy and traitor, who wished to betray us all to the police, would be more than an error, it would be a positive crime, yes, a crime for which Lucien would have a perfect right to reproach you. He is my friend and yours; he is also your partner; and what is more, he will soon be your son, as he will marry Thérèse when he comes out of prison. You owe it to him to save his fortune."

The Grand Master rose up and began to walk up and down. His haggard face revealed the violence of his emotions. The stern, pitiless president of the masons' court was now utterly unnerved.

"And so," said he, in a hoarse voice, and stopping suddenly before Machefer, "I must untomb her, and look upon her—upon the body of the generous girl whose death I caused."

The provision dealer started as though the dead woman's ghost had appeared to him. He himself had expatiated upon the grim affair during the foregoing conversation, but he did not like to hear the terrible truth enunciated in this fashion.

Vernède, meanwhile, took another turn up and down the room. His anguish of mind was evident. The perspiration stood out upon his brow, and it was with a trembling hand that he wiped his moist eyes.

"Yes, alas! it was I who gave the order," he finally resumed. "It was I who remained inflexible to all the prayers of Lucien, and who presided over the execution of that abominable sentence. Ah! there is justice here below, and I have deserved my fate!"

Such was the banker's anguish that he groaned aloud.

"Yes, heaven is just," replied Machefer, "and it has punished you for having ordered this murder; but you have expiated it, and although you doomed a human being to death, you did not intend to cause the death of an innocent being. Virginie Lasbaysses was the victim of a fatality which neither you nor I could have foreseen. It is an irreparable misfortune, I know; but although you cannot restore the poor girl to life, you can at least fulfil her wishes. And it is your duty to do that, my friend. Calm yourself and reflect for a moment. If Zenobia's niece could speak to you from the grave, she would cry out to you to wrest the colonel's fortune from the unworthy heir whom he had cursed, and to complete the mission to which her life was sacrificed."

As Machefer finished this impressive address he brought his stick down upon the banker's writing table with a bang, making the dust fly out of the papers, and nearly upsetting an inkstand. Then he gazed hopefully at his friend, feeling certain that he had won his cause.

Indeed, the banker caught hold of his friend's hand, and pressed it convulsively.

"You are right," he muttered. "That is the only reparation that I can offer to the poor girl, who was executed by my fault. No matter what it may cost me, I will go with you to the quarries. It will be my punishment."

"That is right. Thank God, you are yourself again, my old comrade," said Machefer, who was much more affected than he wished to let the banker see. "It is hard to do this, I know it full well, but you are a man, and there are occasions on which a man ought to keep his repugnance under control, no matter what may be its motive. Besides, I shall be there; and I promise to spare you the sad task which a stern necessity has imposed upon us."

Then once more the provision dealer looked inquiringly at his friend.

"Yes," said Thomas Vernède, bitterly, "you will be able to bear the sight of her dead body, for you did not assassinate her."

And again he made a gesture of despair.

"I have my share in the responsibility of the tragedy," observed Machefer, on hearing this, "for Lucien is the only one among the masons who protested against the sentence; still, I shall have the courage to do my duty, painful though it may be."

"And I shall have the courage to go with you," replied the Grand Master, in a firm voice.

"Well, then, the hour has come," said Machefer, rising up and buttoning his coat. "It is a long way from here to the quarries,

but I hope that we shall not have to remain there any great length of time. I recall only too well the frightful scene of that Sunday night, and I can well remember the place where the pillar stands. I have procured two pickaxes in case one should break ; one must foresee all contingencies. However, I will work alone. And, indeed, I should not have asked you to accompany me if it had not been necessary to guard against a possible encounter with that rascal Loupiac, or some of his agents. Are you armed, Vernède ?”

“Yes,” replied the banker, promptly. “I have a brace of pistols about me.”

“So have I ; and I am sure that we are worth six of those rascals. We can hide the tools and torches under our coats. We ought not to delay a moment longer in going to Montmartre. Come, let us start.”

“I am ready,” replied Thomas Vernède. “We will each take our share of the implements.”

A few moments later the two friends, duly provided with every requisite, sallied forth from the old house in the Rue des Bourdonnais.

As they crossed the courtyard the banker wiped away a tear. On looking up at the crumbling, weather-stained walls, he had seen a light in the room where Thérèse spent her nights bewailing the fate of her lover, Lucien Bellefond. But the time for action had come, and Vernède, trying to dismiss his melancholy thoughts, strode after Machefer in the direction of the Rue Montmartre.

XVIII.

THE public timepieces of Paris were well regulated that evening, for, while ten was striking at the clock of Saint-Eustache's church, it was also striking at the church clock at Montmartre, and the last stroke was still vibrating when Saint-Privat's acolyte, Cornillon, who had been hiding at the foot of the Butte for twenty minutes or so, rose up, and came stealthily out of his nook.

He had seen two shadowy forms approaching noiselessly, and seemingly wending their way towards the spot where he was crouching down.

The recognition was mutual.

Despite the darkness, Cornillon recognised Saint-Privat and the doorkeeper Bourdache, while they on their side guessed that the person whom they had caught sight of must be Cornillon. The latter, as he suddenly stood up, seemed to have sprung from the bowels of the earth, like some Satanic apparition.

Still, they opined that it was he ; for who else could be watching in that lonely spot in such terrible weather ?

The rain was pouring down in torrential fashion, and the wind was blowing furiously ; indeed, one was reminded of an equinoctial storm. The sky was as black as ink, not a star peered forth, and in this lonely region the street lamps—but few in number, by the way—gave no more light than mere sparks.

The esplanade stretched afar, and seemed to be entirely deserted, so that there was no fear of being disturbed.

It would have been hard to find a night more suited for the strange, projected search. At all events, such was Cornillon's opinion, judging by the manner in which he began the conversation.

"This is famous weather, sir, famous !" he exclaimed, as he gleefully rubbed his hands. "If I had ordered it of the clerk of the weather himself it could not suit one better."

"That may be, but I am wet to the skin," growled Saint-Privat. "I shall have a frightful cold to-morrow. My poor bones are already aching with a touch of rheumatism."

"You can dry yourself in the cavern, sir," answered Cornillon, again speaking in the same cheery fashion. "You cannot imagine how much warmer it is in there."

"Did you go in ?"

"Not very far," answered the spy. "The fact is, I did not wish to go in without you ; but I know my way all right now, and we shall get along very well, I promise you."

"Did you bring the axes with you?" now inquired Saint-Privat, as he wiped the rain-drops off his face.

"They are in the vestibule, as you might call it. He! he! a joke that! Three axes and three torches, mind, besides my lanterns. I had a terrible load to carry, let me tell you!"

"I have brought some pistols," observed Saint-Privat, "and Bourdache has done the same. If Trimoulac meddles with our affairs he will find his match."

Clarisse's usually pacific father seemed to have suddenly developed some strangely bellicose proclivities.

"Trimoulac!" retorted Cornillon, "oh! he likes his ease too well to come out in such weather. He must be drinking Jamaica rum or old Cognac with his lady-love the baroness."

"As long as he is not in the cavern, that is all I care for," said Saint-Privat.

"Don't be afraid, sir! I know his ways. He will come here some fine night, sure enough, but it will be too late. The birds will have flown when that dear, good chevalier appears."

"I shouldn't be sorry if I had a chance to break his head for him," growled Bourdache, in his pugnacious way.

"You should never have an inclination for anything that might bring you before the law courts," said Cornillon, philosophically. "Besides, I must say that you surprise me. What did the baroness's admirer ever do to you?"

"Nothing; but I don't like spies, that's all," answered Bourdache, dogmatically.

"Come now, comrade, I belong to the 'house,' mind, and so does the governor, so to say."

"Enough of this!" exclaimed the ex-director of the dark room, who foresaw the disadvantage of any quarrel. "We have no time to talk. Go ahead and show us the way."

Cornillon obeyed. He no doubt resented Bourdache's last remark, and he was, as already stated, by no means partial to the sturdy doorkeeper; but, on the other hand, he did not care to quarrel with him, as he happened to be stronger than himself.

The council had been held at a distance of thirty paces or so from the height. The trio now glided into the opening, where Lucien Bellefond and Timoléon Machefer had waited crouching, one night, now long ago, and they made their way onward—not, however, without Saint-Privat being badly torn by the brambles, and nearly tumbling down on account of the stones.

"Here we are!" said Cornillon, as he parted the bushes to make way for his patron.

"I see nothing but a hole, which seemingly leads nowhere," growled Clarisse's father.

"Don't be afraid, sir," answered Cornillon, still as cheery as ever; "the devil is on our side, I'm sure of it."

"That may be, but he does not light up the landscape," retorted Saint-Privat, with unexpected facetiousness. "I can't see any better than if I were in an oven."

"Take hold of the flap of my coat, sir," suggested Cornillon ; "let the doorkeeper keep behind you, and I will go ahead. In three minutes' time or so we shall not need to grope along. My lantern is in the passage ten paces from here."

No one raised any objection, and on they went like snakes slipping into their holes.

Three minutes had barely elapsed when, as Cornillon had stated, they caught sight of a lighted lantern resting upon the ground in the passage near the three axes, which the detective had provided.

This lantern was of the kind habitually used both by burglars and detectives. Three of its sides were made of tin, which intercepted the light, the latter only showing on the fourth side, which was covered with glass.

"The deuce !" said Saint-Privat, somewhat testily, as he glanced at the lantern, "how shall we be able to work with such a light as that. It's no good at all !"

"Never fear, sir," answered Cornillon, promptly ; "I have brought three torches, which we will light by and by. This little affair here is only to help us to see our way along the vestibule. I thought it best not to make a great illumination. I hope that there is no one inside the place ; but all the same, you know, one cannot be too careful."

"You are right. I must admit it. One never knows what may happen," responded the ex-director of the dark room.

Cornillon, delighted at being complimented by his employer, now hastily distributed the various paraphernalia.

Each of them took up a torch and an axe, and the detective, who also carried the lantern, went on ahead, stepping cautiously, and keeping both his eyes and his ears well open. But he saw nothing save the dripping walls on either side and the darkness ahead, which the lantern progressively furrowed with a ray of light, whilst the only audible sound was that made by their heavy boots as they stepped onward over the rough ground.

The passage seemed to be a long one to all three of them. This narrow, tortuous, stony entry, where Lucien had felt so ill at ease on the night of the execution, was as unpleasant as ever.

They tripped more than once, knocked their heads against the upper vault, which in some places was very low, and scratched their hands against the rough walls, which they felt by way of guiding themselves. Still they persevered with the tenacity of men who have a great purpose in view.

Cornillon, noting that his employer was in difficulties, and remembering, moreover, that the utmost prudence was necessary, soon turned the light of his lantern towards those who followed him,

Then, despite the darkness ahead, he went on methodically, if slowly, and Saint-Privat, now better able to see, followed him with his head stretched out, and listening eagerly.

He seemed as though he had already smelt out the place where the missing will, destined to enrich him, lay concealed.

Bourdache, who had but little to gain by the hazardous venture, was the least excited of the trio.

Presently the vestibule of the cavern grew wider, and the detective, who although progress was now much easier, began to show various signs of anxiety, suddenly stopped short.

"I see a light," said he, in a whisper, as he turned towards Saint-Privat.

"Ah! we have come too late!" muttered Bourdache, who had overheard the remark.

"What's to be done?" resumed the detective, who seemed quite distressed by the discovery he had made.

"We had better go away as fast as we can," said the doorkeeper, who, despite his strength, was not conspicuous for bravery.

It is true that the danger confronting them was most mysterious. They could not tell what odds there might be against them.

"No!" suddenly exclaimed Saint-Privat, bolder even than his retainer, "I will not give the attempt up so easily. Can you go on without letting the lantern be seen, Cornillon?"

"That is easy, sir."

"Go on, then."

Stepping as softly as possible, they then went on a little further, and finally they came into the quarry, where an unexpected sight awaited them.

Beyond a vast zone of shadow in the depths of the huge vault there shone a brilliant light, furnished by four blazing torches, which were stuck in the ground.

This illumination glared upon three pillars, which were almost entirely demolished, and upon a fourth which two men, armed with pickaxes, were vigorously attacking. The loud blows which they dealt re-echoed throughout the dark quarry, amid which the disturbed bats fluttered here and there in a frightened way. With the flaming torchlight and the mysterious workers the whole scene had a singularly weird aspect. It was indeed a study for a painter.

However, our friend Saint-Privat was not at all in the proper frame of mind to appreciate the picturesque character of the sight. He was appalled, dismayed, quite heartbroken to think that, despite all his diligence, he had arrived too late. He now bitterly regretted having spoken so heedlessly in the presence of Trimoulac, for he did not doubt but what one of the two workers was the spurious Chevalier de Loupiac.

"They are there," he muttered at last, with a great effort.

"It is the chevalier, or may the lightning blast me!" rejoined Cornillon, in a whisper,

"One of the fellows looks at though he could fell an ox," growled Bourdache, in his turn.

There was a moment's stupor, and then Saint-Privat clutched his hair with rage and despair. This was indeed an overwhelming discovery.

"All is lost! poor Clarisse!" gasped the old spy, "those rascals are stealing her dowry from me!"

"That is what comes of trusting fellows who belong to the police," said Bourdache to himself.

"Come, come, sir, there's nothing lost as yet. I have an idea," said Cornillon.

"An idea?" repeated Saint-Privat, with a bewildered air. He himself could detect no ray of hope.

"Yes, indeed, sir. My idea is that those two fellows are only working for our benefit."

"Are you crazy?"

"No, sir, not by any means. You yourself will admit that we should have had a deal of trouble in finding the pillar which we ought to open, and now these chaps have found it for us."

"They did not find it at once," muttered the irrepressible Bourdache, "for they have demolished quite half-a-dozen pillars already."

"Well?" asked Clarisse's father, turning impatiently towards Cornillon.

"Well, sir," said the detective, "what is there to prevent us from letting them finish their work, and slipping along the wall, and hiding in the meantime? They will not see my lantern; I am keeping it behind me. So we can glide up without being seen, and hide behind some of the pillars that they have already opened, and when we are within twenty paces of these rascals, and can take a good aim, we will fire, each of us, bring the scamps down like so many rabbits, and then seize upon the will."

This plan was a bold one, no doubt, but it seemed to be practicable; and, besides, what other course could be followed if the chevalier was to be prevented from finding and destroying the will by which the late Colonel Lacaussade bequeathed his large fortune to Lucien Bellefond?

"Cornillon," now said Saint-Privat, with a great show of emotion, "I shall never forget that but for you the million would have escaped me!"

"Then you think my idea a good one, sir?" asked the detective, in a whisper.

"Excellent, my friend," replied the ex-director of the dark room, in the same low tone of voice.

"Very well, then. Let us act up to it."

Then slowly and noiselessly they glided along, in view of taking up their position behind the half-demolished pillars.

XIX.

NATURALLY enough the road to the quarries—that passage along which Saint-Privat had groped with so much difficulty—was familiar to Thomas Vernède and to Machefer, who, as masons, had frequently penetrated within these gloomy precincts.

They had no trouble in finding their way; but when they came to the entrance of the vault in which the poor victim who had been “walled-up” by his orders was entombed, the Grand Master felt greatly agitated.

He possessed a strong mind, as he had proved on various occasions, but the execution of Virginie Lasbaysses had led him to reflect a great deal as to his past course of action.

The error which he had committed in dispensing the stern justice of the society was indeed calculated to disturb him. In fact, for the first time in his life he doubted the right to deal out such justice.

He asked himself, moreover, whether the real or supposed transgressions of the government which he was so desirous of overthrowing gave him the right to dispose of the life of a fellow-creature, and he had almost made up his mind that they did not give him such a right.

Machefer, who had but a small part of responsibility in this singularly unfortunate affair, was much less overcome by the remembrance of the scene enacted in the quarry on the night of the 2nd of July.

Moreover, his naturally careless disposition upheld and sustained him on trying occasions, and he was generally disposed to reconcile himself to the inevitable.

It is certain that he sincerely deplored the sad fate of Zenobia Capitaine's niece, but as he had no power to bring her to life again, he considered that he ought to content himself with carrying out her intentions by snatching the will from Trimoulac's clutches.

To prevent that rascal from appropriating the colonel's money would be some slight revenge for Virginie's death, for, to tell the truth, it was the Chevalier de Loupiac who had brought her into that fatal trap by the forged letter which he had sent to Périgueux, and he was perhaps even more culpable than the masons themselves.

While Machefer and Vernède were on the way from the Rue des Bourdonnais to Montmartre, these reflections had been communicated by the provision dealer to the banker, for he thus hoped to comfort him, and, in fact, he had succeeded in doing so to some extent.

Still Vernède had only replied by monosyllables, and when they reached the foot of the height, the provision dealer had nothing more to bring forward in the way of consolation.

The time and place were ill suited to conversation, and the weather had become abominable, as it was raining in torrents, and the vast deserted esplanade offered no shelter whatever.

It was time to act, and Machefer, always expeditious, set to work immediately.

"I think," said he to his companion, "that we had better not light our torches in the passage. On such an occasion as this, my dear fellow, we cannot be too careful."

"As you please," replied Vernède, who seemed to be lost in painful thoughts.

"Besides, we do not need any light," resumed the provision dealer. "I know the way into the quarry as well as I know my own staircase, and I will go ahead."

The banker did not reply to this remark, but mechanically followed his old friend, who was already going towards the opening where, two months before, he had waited in Lucien's company for Virginie's executioners.

"Hallo!" said he, as he bent down to explore the entry, "the brambles are broken, and lots of the branches are pulled on one side. Some of the thistles have even been rooted up, and these breaks are all fresh. Some one has come this way quite recently, I feel certain of it."

"Some of the brethren, perhaps," remarked Vernède, in a careless way, for his thoughts were hardly with the present.

"That's impossible," retorted Machefer. "What on earth could they come here for? They know that the police have their eyes open just now, and they are not so mad as to endanger themselves by entering the quarry. To tell the truth, I am afraid that Loupiac has been here. What do you think, Vernède?"

"I think that at all events the matter must be brought to an end. I did not wish to come, but you persuaded me to do so. We are here, so let us enter, at all hazards. Besides," added the banker, "I shouldn't be sorry to meet that scoundrel face to face."

"You have something to say to him, have you not?" rejoined Machefer, with a laugh.

"I shall break his head with this pickaxe," replied the banker, in a threatening tone.

His hatred of Loupiac was greater than ever now; for he had not merely occasion to reproach him for his treachery as regards the society—it was through him that the unfortunate Virginie Lasbaysses had met her death.

"Upon my word, I will aid you willingly in ridding the earth of the reptile," answered Machefer. "If it be really he who is ahead of us, and we find him in here, he will be alone, or, at all events, he will not have many assistants with him, for he would not bring a squad

of police spies to help him to find that will which he is so anxious to destroy. Let us go in."

Then, slipping into the opening, the provision dealer speedily reached the passage. Vernède followed closely. The route was well known to them. They had passed along it often enough to be acquainted with every turn, and had soon gone over its entire length.

Trimoléon Machefer, who was ahead of his friend, was naturally the first to see what was going on in the depths of the quarry.

The torches lighted by Loupiac and his assistant now shone more brilliantly than ever, and their light would have instantly caught far less practised eyes than those of the wary Machefer, who stopped short and held out his hand to prevent Vernède from going further.

"I was right," he whispered. "The rascal has come here before us, and is at work already."

"He is not alone," muttered the banker, as he craned his head forward to get a better view of the strange sight.

"Of course not; he was afraid to work by himself, and so he has brought an assistant with him. I wonder where he found that tall, long-legged fellow, who is working away with so much energy."

"That fellow must be some rascal like himself, of course," responded Vernède.

"I suspect so; and he is very hard at work. Why, he has destroyed half the pillar already."

"It is not the first one either, the others are already more or less demolished."

"That is a good proof that they do not know exactly where the body was buried," muttered Machefer. "And, by the way, that strikes me as being very astonishing! Cyrille might have given Loupiac full particulars when he betrayed us, for he was at the execution."

"What does it matter? He will soon know the truth, the pillar that he is now working upon, is the very one in which that poor woman was walled up," rejoined Vernède, in a hoarse voice.

The emotion which he felt was no doubt shared by Machefer, who remained silent, and leant against the wall of the corridor, gazing upon the weird scene.

Where they stood the two friends were completely out of sight. The brighter the light of the torches flaring in the centre of the quarry, the denser the shadows all around.

Thus it was impossible for Loupiac and his assistant to see Vernède and Machefer. However, the latter could see perfectly well. They did not miss a single movement; each stroke dealt by the fellow who was working for the spurious chevalier was alike visible and audible from the entrance of the passage where they stood.

"What shall we do?" asked Machefer, after a moment spent in gazing at the scene and forming resolutions.

"We must kill them," replied the Grand Master, with an impressive gesture.

"I agree with you. But how? They are too far off to be shot with pistols," replied the provision dealer.

"Yes, indeed, that's true; we should nass them. And what's more, the noise would give the alarm; they would put out their torches at once, and so escape us."

"Certainly; and I see but one course available," resumed Machefer. "It is to glide up behind them and knock them down with our pickaxes."

"Very well. I should even prefer that. At least, I should see them die," responded Vernède, savagely.

"I should enjoy it, too—the wretched informers!"

Machefer, as his words evidenced, had suddenly developed a most sanguinary disposition.

"How shall we get near enough to them?" the Grand Master now inquired.

"Oh! it is very easy. We must keep along the wall till we are near one of the pillars, then we will fall upon them, taking care, first of all, to shelter ourselves behind the pillars. We can crawl along, if necessary. As long as we keep out of the circle of light afforded by the torches, that will be everything."

"When we are near enough we will fall upon them."

"All right. But let us leave our torches here, for they would only be in our way when we make a rush upon them. There's no time to lose, Vernède. That great fellow is striking away without cessation. With a few more strokes he will bring down the whole pillar."

"Come!" said Vernède, who had now fully made up his mind to bring matters to a violent issue.

Machefer had just emerged from the entrance gallery, and he was about to advance in the direction of the pillars previously demolished, when all at once, in an apprehensive way, he seized hold of his friend's arm. Clutching it firmly, he whispered: "Look there!"

"What do you mean? I cannot see anything," whispered Vernède in reply.

Indeed, the scene appeared to be unchanged. The chevalier's assistant was still hard at work; the torches flared; the bats flew around. What else could Machefer have noticed?

"Come," he responded; "look over there, on the left. Don't you distinguish that faint light that is coming along in the shade?"

"Ah, yes, I see it now. It must be a lantern."

"A lantern, which somebody or other is carrying, sure enough."

"Yes, the light is moving."

"It is going in the direction of the spot where Loupiac stands."

"Yes, you are right. The man who carries it must be one of his hirelings who is about to join him."

Machefer, however, was not of this opinion.

"No," said he; "if the man with the lantern was in the chevalier's pay he would walk straight along; but see, he is going along sideways, and stops from time to time in a suspicious, half-apprehensive manner. I feel sure that he is hiding, and stealthily watching the others."

"True. Any one would think that he is doing precisely what you just suggested we should do."

"That is my opinion."

"Well, all this is incomprehensible to me," resumed Thomas Vernède; "and I cannot imagine who that man with the lantern can be."

"I can guess who it is," replied the quick-witted provision dealer.

"Who is it, then?"

"Why, the other rascal, of course; the man who also has an interest in getting the colonel's will, and who has been Loupiac's competitor throughout this business."

"I really don't understand you," replied Vernède, with some little impatience.

"What! Have you forgotten what I told you about my journey to Périgueux? Don't you remember the goings-on of that fellow Bonnin, the swaggerer whose conversation I heard at the café in the Rue des Bourdonnais, the man with the gold spectacles who sat on my left in the coach when I travelled to the south?"

"Can it be that fellow?" asked the Grand Master, somewhat incredulously.

"Of course it is he! The two rascals are both playing the same game, and they have naturally come to the only place where the coveted will is to be found."

"But they have not come to an understanding, it would seem," remarked Vernède, still but partially convinced.

"No, indeed! If they were acting in concert they would have come together and be working together, but—look—the fellow carrying the lantern has just stopped behind one of the partially-demolished pillars!"

"Yes, the light is not moving now," said Vernède. "Well, if that fellow is Bonnin, as you suppose, it would seem as if he were going to attack Trimoulac."

"Yes, indeed," responded Machefer. "He is going to carry out a plan like the one which we had made."

"What! do you think——"

"That he would kill the Chevalier de Loupiac?—of course I do," was Machefer's ready retort.

"I doubt it, remembering what you told me of the man. He must be a coward. He would not venture to attack two persons."

"How do you know that he is alone?"

"It seems to me——"

"Ah! I was not mistaken," now ejaculated the provision dealer,

in a barely audible tone. "That light, which is that of a dark lantern, fell just this moment upon two men who are behind the one ahead. Bonnin is prudent, and has brought some assistants with him. That's clear enough."

"But what are they about to do?" asked Vernède. And, indeed, the situation was a puzzling one.

"I do not exactly know, but I imagine that they have the same intention as we had. They will probably steal up to the two men and kill them with their pistols, if they have any—which is probable."

"What are they waiting for, then?"

"They are no doubt waiting till Trimoulac finishes with his work. Bonnin, by dint of ferreting about, possibly learnt the story of Virginie Lasbaysses's disappearance. He must have discovered, I fancy, that she was seized by mistake and walled up in one of the pillars in this quarry, but he did not know which pillar it was. He concluded, however, that his rival must know."

"Then he was mistaken," retorted Thomas Vernède; "for if Loupiac had known he would not have tried so many pillars in which he has found nothing. This work has not all been done in one night. Who knows how many times he has been here already? Judging by the amount of work which has been accomplished, I should think he had been here on three or four occasions at the least."

"Perhaps so; Bonnin may have followed him from the beginning," suggested Machefer. "At all events, he will watch him now till he has found the will, which will soon happen, for the workman is making rapid progress."

"Then you think——"

"I think that old Bonnin and his men will fire at Maxime Trimoulac and his companion as soon as they fancy that the right moment has come, and as they seem to me to be quite near enough to take a good aim, they will not miss them."

"And when they have despatched them, they will snatch the will from them, I suppose."

"That is certain."

"A double murder, side by side with a dead body!" exclaimed Vernède, bitterly.

"Those people have no scruples, that is quite certain," responded the provision dealer.

"Do you mean to let them do this?"

Machefer looked in amazement at his companion. But they could not distinguish one another's features; and the banker's friend contented himself with asking, by way of reply:

"Can you intend to defend Loupiac?"

"No, but I confess that I do not like to see this deed done," answered Vernède, promptly.

"It is indispensable, however."

"What is your plan, then?"

"My plan is this. It is a simple one, as you will see. To begin with, we must not stir from here. We are in the best box at a play, as it were. Thanks to those four torches provided by our friend Trimoulac, we can see all that goes on. We shall see two rascals exterminated by three other rascals. It will be quickly accomplished, I fancy, and as soon as the conquerors seize upon the fruits of their victory, that is to say, when they have found the will, they will make off—that is to say, they will come in this direction. Now this is a good place to lie in wait for them."

"And to attack them? So that is what you mean?" responded the Grand Master.

"Yes, and if you are not willing to do that, I am. I feel pugnacious to-night. My pickaxe would settle the three scamps, who will not expect an attack, and will not reload their pistols. When we are rid of them, I will take Colonel Lacaussade's will out of Bonnin's pocket, and we will leave this cursed quarry to return no more. To-morrow morning Lucien Bellefond will be a millionaire. What do you say to that plan?"

Machefer expected that his friend would readily acquiesce to this sanguinary scheme. But Vernède, violent as he was at times, by no means approved of wholesale slaughter.

"I say that I will defend you if your life is in danger, but I will not make any attack," he replied. "I am perfectly willing to kill that scoundrel Loupiac, but I cannot forget that the others have done me no harm."

"Come to my help, then, if I need you, that is all I ask," replied Machefer.

The whole of this singular conversation had been carried on in a very low tone, and, moreover, the noise of the pickaxe wielded by Loupiac's assistant was echoed by the vault above, and thus prevented the talk being heard.

Tranquebar was working away furiously with his herculean arms, excited by the presence and encouragement of his employer, from whom he expected an income of six thousand francs a year, plus a good dinner, and a liberal supply of fine old brandy once a week.

The Chevalier de Loupiac, on his side, unremittingly urged on the work of demolition, which, thanks to Tranquebar's strength, proceeded with astonishing rapidity. Great blocks of plaster fell at each blow of the pickaxe, and rolled upon the ground, which was strewn with huge fragments.

The pillar which the workman had attacked had already been sounded on various sides, for there were gaps all round it, and the particular breach that was now being assailed was growing visibly wider.

"The end is near at hand," muttered Machefer, after a moment spent in watchful scrutiny. "Bonnin and his friends are creeping up closer I see."

"I just saw the butt of a pistol, I think," replied Vernède, who also kept his eyes upon the scene.

"I say, Thomas," resumed the provision dealer, "what if Loupiac should see his rivals before they fire? In that case he would probably attack them first, and then we should see a regular fight. It would be very amusing."

"I shouldn't be sorry if matters took that course," answered the Grand Master. "In that way they would all kill one another, and you would not be driven to soiling your hands with the blood of these scamps."

"Well, I was mistaken, it seems; we shall not have the pleasure of seeing the battle from afar, for Loupiac is just popping his head into the hole which the other man has made."

"And I see the three other fellows gliding along by the wall. They are going round the pillar over there. It hides them—see, they have all three disappeared."

"Oh! I understand their game," muttered Machefer. "They are going to fire when they are close enough."

"I no longer see them, so I can't say," whispered Vernède.

Another moment of suspense passed by.

"They are in sight again," suddenly observed Machefer; "they are stooping down, and now, see, they are creeping along just like cats watching a mouse."

"Cannot Loupiac see them?" asked the banker.

"No, he is looking into the gap to find out whether the workman who is leaning upon his pickaxe has made the hole big enough for them to drag the sack out."

"They will be shot," muttered Vernède at this moment, "for the others are about to fire."

"No, not yet; for, look, the chevalier is straightening himself up again!"

"And now the others are crouching down."

"Well," remarked Machefer, "it seems that the opening is not wide enough, for Loupiac has made a sign to his companion to go on working, and, indeed, he is beginning again lustily. What blows! If he goes on like that he will bring down the whole pillar. What on earth can Bonnin be waiting for to fire? The chevalier gave him a good chance just now—he was standing with his back to him, and the other was working away. I wonder how it will all end."

Our portly friend witnessed the termination of the affair much sooner than he had expected. Vernède was just seizing hold of his arm, and pointing in an excited way to Bonnin and his companions, who were about to make the attack, pistol in hand, when suddenly the upper part of the pillar in which the body of Zenobia's niece was entombed fell with a frightful crash. It had been cut atwain, as it were, by the blows of Tranquebar's pickaxe.

Then part of the vault, abruptly deprived of another of its supports, fell with the nearest pillars which were already half destroyed. An

enormous mass of the plaster fell like an avenging avalanche upon the five scoundrels, who, close to the hapless Virginie's remains, were about to dispute with one another for the possession of the colonel's will. And this mass, falling with the noise of thunder, crushed the miscreants, and buried them for ever.

Loud was the echo which boomed through the vast quarry, and so great was the shock that the soil quivered underfoot. It was like an earthquake, and the two friends were thrown with extreme violence against the walls of the entrance-passage, which was, fortunately, far enough off for the shock to lose its force there.

In an instant the bright light of the torches was extinguished, and profound darkness prevailed. The terrified bats wheeled round and round, and as the rumble of the subsidence ceased, the agonised shriek of an owl rose up from the black depths.

A thick dust filled the air, and it was scarcely possible for one to breathe.

"If we remain here ten minutes longer we shall be stifled," said Machefer. "I hope that the way out is free. Come."

Then, dragging Vernède with him, he rushed along the passage.

Fortunately enough there had been no subsidence here. The road was clear, and a few moments later the two friends found themselves at the foot of the height, on the very spot where, two months previously, the first act of the drama which had had such tragical results had been enacted.

The storm was over now, and the sky was bright with twinkling stars. The esplanade and the neighbouring streets were silent and deserted. The exterior appearance of the height was unchanged. It was evident that the catastrophe had been limited to an internal subsidence, the noise of which had been deadened in such a way that it had not attracted any attention outside. In all probability the mystery of the quarry would never be penetrated.

"Ah! good heavens! we have had a narrow escape," said Machefer, drawing a long breath; "but, at all events, all those rascals are dead."

"Heaven is just," replied Vernède, in a low tone, full of feeling, "for in punishing them it also chastises me for having condemned an innocent creature. Colonel Lacaussade's will is buried with the scoundrels who attempted to steal it from Lucien."

"The fact is," retorted the provision dealer, "that now, unless we blow up the Butte Montmartre, we shall never see the colonel's signature; but console yourself, my old friend, all is not lost; I will——"

"Heaven is just, I tell you," was Vernède's rejoinder. "I accept its judgment, and I will bear my punishment, hard as it may be, without a murmur."

Then slowly and thoughtfully the two friends retraced their steps towards the city gates,

XX.

ON the day following this eventful night, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Thomas Vernède was seated in his office. He had just finished examining some accounts, and was putting various important papers in order.

The expression of his face was even sterner than usual, and his contracted features told of the bitter struggle that was going on within him.

He had grown ten years older in one night.

He was, however, free from the worst of all tortures—suspense; for he knew that the will was now irrevocably lost, and thus his mind was now fully made up.

He was aware, painfully aware, that he could not hope for any help from Lucien Bellefond, his partner, and he now only thought of regulating his affairs in view of the inevitable catastrophe.

It was the 10th of September, and he still had twenty days before him, but at the end of the month his failure would be an accomplished fact. There was not the slightest chance of his being able to avert it.

In one sense he was resigned, however, and he would have accepted his fate with perfect stoicism had it not been for one cruel thought. His beloved child would be reduced to poverty, and obliged to work for a livelihood, and this idea preyed like torture upon Thomas Vernède's mind.

Still he relied upon Thérèse's courage, and he hoped that she would have sufficient strength of mind to bear her undeserved misfortunes.

He had already traced out in his mind a plan of future action for himself and his daughter. He meant to employ the time remaining to him in preparing for the sad event which threatened him, and in getting together all his resources pending the arrival of that fatal date, the 30th of September.

Then, after having met his obligations as far as it was possible for him to do so, after expending his last copper in his effort to satisfy his creditors, he meant to leave the country with Thérèse.

Machefer would certainly lend him money enough to go to America, and there, on the free soil of a new world, there was some chance of an energetic and intelligent man making his way; and, although the banker was no longer young, he felt himself endowed with sufficient energy to woo fortune once more.

Moreover, he did not doubt Thérèse's affection, and he knew that the noble girl would sacrifice everything for her father's sake, even her love ; still he did not wish to ask so much as that from her.

Lucien was in prison, but he could not remain there long, now that the man who had intended to denounce him as a conspirator was dead. The infamous Trimoulac, buried beneath the ruins of the vault at Montmartre, had perished before he had revealed the secret of the conspiracy. That old knave Saint-Privat, and his assistants, were also dead ; and to all appearance there remained no one who was at all likely to accuse Lieutenant Bellefond of a crime. The banker and Machefer were neither of them aware of the fact that Cyrille the traitor was in prison.

On the other hand, the duel with the Prussian officer was not of a nature to warrant a severe condemnation ; and, indeed, everything seemed to show that the young officer would be released without even being sent for trial. Machefer had learnt from the commissary of police who arrested Lucien that the two English officers who had acted as seconds had, on hearing of the affair, come of their own accord to certify that the duel had been conducted according to the code of honour.

It was therefore permissible to believe that Lucien would soon be set free, and the banker had made up his mind to ask him to go with him to the United States, against the promise that he should marry his daughter. He thought that the lieutenant would be willing to exile himself on those terms, and indeed he was not mistaken. Lucien would have made any sacrifice for the sake of his adored Thérèse.

If the prisoner's captivity lasted longer than the banker could wait, there would be nothing to prevent Lucien from crossing the ocean to join him when he at last regained his liberty, and Machefer would always be there to acquaint him with Thomas Vernède's intentions.

One consolation remained to the ruined banker and afflicted father. The three hundred thousand francs due to the Marquis de Baffey were ready for him and waiting. In order to keep them in readiness for the payment on the morrow, the 11th of September, he had, as the reader already knows, asked for a slight delay on the part of one of his creditors, to whom he owed a large sum, and he experienced a bitter satisfaction in the thought that he would not have to blush before Lucien's rival. Amid his overwhelming misfortune, this feeling alone brought him some little consolation.

"I will show that marquis that a man of the people like myself is as honourable as a nobleman like he is," muttered Vernède, as he leant back in his arm-chair ; "and if he still dares to parade his so-called generosity, if he has the audacity to renew his insolent offer of marriage, I will drive him from my office, as, indeed, I ought to have done the day when he first presumed to mention Thérèse's name."

While he was thus soliloquising, the door of the office abruptly opened, and the cashier appeared upon the threshold. He was a timid-looking little man, and wore glasses.

"What is the matter?" demanded the banker, testily. "I told you that I wished to be alone."

"I beg your pardon, sir," replied the cashier; "I should not have intruded, but it is on account of the note."

"What note?" inquired M. Vernède, with no little surprise.

The cashier seemed to be taken aback. "Why, sir, the money due to Costier & Co., of Havre," he replied; "a hundred and thirty thousand five hundred francs. As it is a large sum, I thought best to let you know——"

"To let me know what?" inquired the banker, who had now turned very pale.

"That I have paid it, sir," replied the cashier, in a placid, self-satisfied manner.

"You scoundrel!" exclaimed Vernède, rising hastily from his leather-seated arm-chair.

His agitation was so great that the cashier drew back in alarm. He evidently fancied that his employer had lost his wits.

However, the banker, controlling himself by a wonderful effort of will, resumed more quietly:

"That note ought not to have been presented to-day. I really cannot understand it. Did you not know that I had written to Havre to ask Messrs. Costier & Co. not to draw upon me till the 25th of this month?"

"That is true, sir," replied the cashier, "but those gentlemen replied that they had had unexpected calls upon their funds, and—their letter came at noon to-day—I was going to show it to you, but you were out, and just afterwards the note was presented. I did not know that you had returned, or I should have told you. In your absence, and having no orders to the contrary, I thought that I was doing right in paying the note on presentation."

Thomas Vernède passed his hand over his brow, closed his eyes for an instant, and then fell rather than seated himself on his chair again.

"You did right," he answered.

The cashier then bowed and left the room.

"I am lost!" muttered the unfortunate banker, in despair. "I am lost! I am disgraced for ever! To-morrow that man will come to claim the money which he confided to me, and I shall have to tell him that I have not got it. Then he will have the right to call me a thief, that haughty nobleman whom I meant to dismiss as soon as I had paid him! By God! I could strangle him! But no, he will not insult me, he will propose to buy my daughter's hand for the three hundred thousand francs that I cannot return to him! That will be his plan—a plan worthy of him and his species! Ah, God in heaven! this is too much!"

Then Vernède, raising his hands to his head, fell into the most despairing thoughts.

This was the last blow. It was all over. The one hope that had remained to him had vanished. The future life which he had hoped to lead with Thérèse across the ocean could not be realised, for he was not a man to bear the shame of the morrow, and whatever might take place during the coming interview with the Marquis de Baffey, the unfortunate banker felt that the meeting would be fatal to himself and to his daughter.

Then he began to think once more of the terrible fate of the young girl who had been walled up, and whom he, the Grand Master, the chief of that terrible association of conspirators, had unhesitatingly sentenced to death; and as he thought of her he wept bitterly, strong-minded though he was.

He wept for Zenobia's unfortunate niece, who had fallen a victim to an error for which he bitterly reproached himself, and for the first time in his life he cursed the political passions which had led to the immolation of an innocent victim.

Political fanaticism now filled the once stern conspirator with horror, and he acknowledged in his own heart that no cause was holy and just enough to warrant the taking away of a human life.

Then the idea of expiation returned to his mind. It had come to him once before, in the cavern at Montmartre, and, indeed, at the moment of the catastrophe by which Trimoulac, Saint-Privat, and his acolytes had perished, he had at first thought that heaven was punishing him.

He now felt that the expiation had but begun, and he bowed to it without a murmur; but he trembled lest the divine vengeance should also fall upon his daughter. And, indeed, had it not already fallen upon her, as the loss of the colonel's will would ruin her betrothed?

What would Lucien Bellefond say, on being set free, when he learnt that it was Vernède's conduct as Grand Master that had led to the loss of his fortune?

The more the unfortunate banker pondered upon the situation of affairs, the more plainly did he realise that there was but one issue to it—a fatal one.

The impossibility of confiding his tortures to a friend increased his anguish. Machefer was the only man to whom he could open his heart; but since that momentous expedition to the quarry at Montmartre he had not seen him.

No doubt the provision dealer was busy at his shop; and it was quite possible that the easy-going old fellow did not care to see Vernède, for fear of being worried with lamentations which he no doubt foresaw. Such, at all events, was the banker's idea.

It would have been easy enough to repair to the Rue du Jour; but the whilom Grand Master of the masons was in that state of

despair, mingled with indifference, in which a man does not attempt to struggle any longer against his fate, but suffers chance to bear him along as though it were a runaway horse carrying him at full speed towards a precipice.

He had now made up his mind as to the evil, but before bringing it about, he wished to see the only person to whom he thought himself called upon to render an account.

That person was his daughter, his dear Thérèse, who had lately spent the greater part of her time in her own room, and whom he had not seen all day. Her sole companion now was the little humpback, with whom she talked unceasingly of Lucien. However, she had derived no comfort from *Æsop's* visit to the Marquis de Baffey, for the lad had taken care not to tell her about it.

He feared that she might find fault with him for having acted so boldly without her authorisation, and although, when he saw his dear protectress's tears fall, he said to himself that the only means of consoling her would be to tell her that one of the king's officers, a great nobleman, had promised to ask for Lucien's pardon, he did not dare to do so, so great was his timidity.

On that 10th of September, the day before that when the sum deposited with Vernède by the Marquis de Baffey had to be paid, the banker's daughter was even sadder than usual. Not because she knew of the misfortune which threatened her father, for she was ignorant of the precise facts, but this day had gone by like so many others, without her beloved prisoner giving any signs of life, and she was beginning to despair of ever seeing him again.

Little *Æsop*, who was sitting on a stool at her feet, and holding a skein of silk for her to wind, thought to himself that the effect of his appeal to the old countess's handsome nephew was very long in manifesting itself. In his childish way he had imagined that it would suffice if the marquis spoke for the doors of Lucien's prison to fly open.

All at once the lieutenant's betrothed ceased winding up the silk and let it fall. Her eyes, which were turned towards the open window, were filled with tears.

"Why do you weep, mademoiselle?" asked the little humpback. "He gave me those flowers—those flowers on the windowsill," replied the young girl, "a year ago, on my birthday. They still live, but his love may be dead; they still live, but Lucien may not be alive in another month, and on my birthday he will not be here to congratulate me."

"Yes, he will, I'm sure, mademoiselle," replied *Æsop*, speaking with unusual earnestness.

Thérèse looked at him with surprise, and added: "No, I shall never see him again. This new government shows no pity to those who dare to oppose it."

"You will see him; I promise you that you will," rejoined *Æsop*, in the same earnest manner.

"What do you mean?" inquired Mademoiselle Vernède, half imagining that the lad had learnt some good news.

The humpback hesitated for an instant, then making up his mind all at once, he fell upon his knees, and joining his hands, exclaimed, in a pleading voice:

"Forgive me, mademoiselle; forgive me. I ought to have told you about it beforehand, and asked your permission; but seeing you so very sad, I thought that it would be right to——"

"What have you done?" interrupted Thérèse, excited and rendered anxious by this preamble.

"Why, I knew, mademoiselle, that Monsieur Lucien had saved a great nobleman who had met with an accident," replied the lad, "I heard what Monsieur Machefer told you about that marquis who lives in the Rue de Varennes——"

"What! Monsieur de Baffey?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, and I thought that the marquis, if he had any feeling, would not refuse to interest himself about Monsieur Bellefond. I felt sure, too, that if he asked for a pardon for him he would get it."

"Did you see him and speak with him?" inquired Thérèse, whose heart was beating fast.

"Yes," stammered the poor child. "I saw him—his servants were going to drive me away, but he came to the door of the house and called me. Then I had the courage to make an appeal to him—he listened to me, and——"

"Go on!" exclaimed Mademoiselle Vernède, who was all impatience to know the finish.

"Well, he told me, mademoiselle, that in three days' time he would come to bring you the answer."

"To me?—I will not see him! I will not see him!" exclaimed Thérèse, who was greatly agitated by this unexpected confession.

A moment's silence ensued. *Æsop* was hanging down his head, as if in fault. Then all at once Thérèse asked him: "Did you say that I had sent you?"

"Yes," murmured the humpback, who had kept back this part of his story—the most difficult to tell.

"You did very wrong!" exclaimed the young girl, angrily, stamping her foot, and flushing crimson.

"Oh! mademoiselle," pleaded little *Æsop*, "if you only knew how kind he was, how gently he spoke to me, although he must have taken a poor-looking creature as I am for a beggar. Yes, I am sure that his answer will be that he has succeeded in getting Monsieur Lucien released from prison."

"If I could only believe that!" muttered the young girl, who was a prey to conflicting thoughts.

"You may believe it, mademoiselle, he is good, I saw that; and powerful, too, I'm sure of it. His house is like a palace; and, besides,

there was an old lady there who was going to get into a splendid carriage, and she also promised——"

"Promised you?"

"No, she promised a young lady who had come like me to ask for the prisoner's release."

"A young lady!" gasped Mademoiselle Vernède, turning extremely pale.

"Yes, mademoiselle; a young lady who had a man with her. It was that man who is the doorkeeper of the house in the Rue d'Enfer—the one who shut me up in the cellar there."

"Ah! I knew very well that it was a woman who kept him away when he was wounded!" exclaimed Thérèse, in a sorrowful tone.

"My presentiments did not deceive me."

"Well, she said to the great lady that her father did not know that she had come to ask her to help Lieutenant Bellefond."

"And you say that the old lady listened to her and then promised her——"

"She mentioned several names that I had never heard before, and talked about a number of things that I didn't understand; but she said at last: 'I will speak to Fouché about the matter. He'll settle it.' I remember that very well."

"In that case," said Thérèse, with marked bitterness, "if I see him again I shall owe my happiness to a rival!"

Æsop was now beginning to understand that he had better have held his tongue, and he was just about to try and justify himself when, hearing a footstep outside the door, he rose from his knees in haste.

It was Vernède who entered.

His face was sad, but he had such an amount of control over himself that Thérèse, who was accustomed to see him looking serious, did not guess what gloomy thoughts filled his mind. Rising from her chair she went up to him, and kissed him affectionately upon the brow.

"Leave us, my boy," said the banker, turning to Æsop, who went away at once.

The poor little fellow was only too glad to escape from the embarrassment into which his indiscretion had thrown him.

"Thérèse, my dear, I must have a serious conversation with you," said the banker.

The young girl's first impulse had been to throw her arms around her father's neck and inform him of what the humpback had told her; but, seeing him so stern and thoughtful, she had not the courage to speak out.

She felt as though her sobs would choke her if she attempted to do so.

"You know, my dear child," resumed Vernède, sitting down, "that I have lately met with some very heavy losses. I mentioned the matter to you before."

Thérèse made a gesture expressive of complete indifference.

"I am aware that you do not care for money," added the banker, trying to smile.

"I care very little for it," was Thérèse's answer.

"All the same, you must certainly feel an interest in my honour as a business man."

"Oh! father, can you doubt that?" exclaimed the young girl, forgetting her own grief.

"Heaven forbid, my child. If I speak to you about my financial embarrassments, it is because I wish to explain to you the purpose of the journey that I am about to take."

"What! are you going away?" asked the young girl, who was extremely surprised.

"Yes, my dear Thérèse," answered Vernède, trying to steady his voice and assume a less downcast air. "I must go to England on business of the utmost importance. I must collect a large amount of money which is due to me by a merchant in London, and I shall certainly lose it if I do not go after it myself."

"Indeed, how sorry I am to hear that you must go," said Thérèse.

"Oh, my presence is indispensable—it is urgent, moreover, that I should go at once, and accordingly I shall start to-morrow morning."

"To-morrow morning?"

"Yes; I must go then."

"Will you stay away long, father?" asked Thérèse, still greatly surprised by this communication.

"I do not as yet know how long I shall be detained; but I may be obliged to remain longer than I expect, and I must make arrangements in case I should not be able to return for some weeks."

"For so long as that?" remarked the young girl.

"Yes, unfortunately," answered Vernède, with a sigh. "However, I have so settled matters that you will not be too lonely in my absence."

In speaking these last words, the banker's voice shook despite all his efforts; however, he soon controlled himself once more, and resumed, with tolerable calmness: "You cannot remain in this house."

"Why not, father?"

"Why, an old servant and a lad are not sufficient protection for a young girl. That being the case, I have thought of a plan which will meet with your approval, I think. My old friend Machefer is of a proper age to take my place as regards you, and be a father to you; so I wish you to go and stay in the Rue du Jour during my absence, in a room that you know very well."

"Father, I will do as you wish," replied Thérèse. "As you are going away for a time, I think that what you suggest would be the most fitting course."

"Thanks, my child. I thought that the suggestion would suit you. Well, I am going to see Machefer to-day, and I will arrange

with him for you to stay at his house, together with the little lad whom you are so fond of, and I am sure that it will please him. But I have something else to ask."

"What is it?"

"I wish you to make me a promise," replied the banker, in an impressive voice.

"A promise?"

"Yes, a promise that you will not object to keep, Thérèse," resumed Vernède. "Promise me that you will marry our poor friend, Lucien Bellefond."

"Lucien!" repeated the young girl.

"Oh, I know what you will say," exclaimed the banker, speaking rapidly, as if he wished to bring the interview to a speedy termination. "You will say that he is not here, and that when he returns he may have changed, and that he must ask you to marry him before you can do so. But that is all girlish talk, my child. You are as sure of Lucien's love as I am of the fact that he will soon be set at liberty."

"Heaven grant it, but——"

"There are no *buts*," interrupted Thomas Vernède, fondly pressing his poor daughter to his heart. "Promise me, my dearest, that you will be his wife."

"I promise you, father," replied Thérèse, in a soft voice, "that I will never marry any one else, and that I will marry him, providing he still cares for me."

"If he still cares for you! What nonsense! Can any one doubt Lucien's love for you?"

Before Thérèse could reply, a gentle knock was heard at the door.

The banker opened it, and found himself face to face with his cashier, who apologised for disturbing his employer, but assured him that his presence in the office was indispensable, as he must sign the letters that were about to be taken to the post.

"Very good. I'll come at once," said the banker to his cashier.

Thereupon he kissed Thérèse even more tenderly than usual, and went away, happy in being able to curtail his explanations, but scarcely able to keep from weeping.

He had a dread purpose in his mind!

XXI.

ON the following day, at daylight, Thomas Vernède was seated at his desk in the dim little office of the Rue des Bourdonnais, where three-fourths of his life had been spent.

He had passed the whole night in writing. Long sheets of paper covered with figures, and several letters which he had already sealed up, showed that many wakeful hours had been spent in toil.

After bidding Thérèse farewell on the day before, he had not had the courage to see her again. In fact, upon the pretext that he was obliged to have an interview with one of his correspondents he had gone out as soon as his office was closed.

He then wandered about Paris till a late hour of the night, absorbed in gloomy thoughts, picturing the whole of his past life; his modest circumstances at the outset of his career; the tragic death of his parents; the Revolutionary scenes which he had witnessed and taken part in; the country in danger; the march of the shoeless defenders of France to the frontier; the guillotine reared on the Place de la Révolution, and the batches of condemned prisoners who mounted the fatal steps day by day; then the easier times of the Directory; his own accession to comparative affluence; Bonaparte's brutal assumption of authority; and the foundation of the Society of the Brethren of the Plaster as a protest against the annihilation of liberty. Then there was that fatal scene in the quarry at Montmartre—the execution of an innocent victim. This especially dwelt in Vernède's mind as he restlessly roamed about that night; do what he would he could not rid himself of the fatal remembrance.

At last, tired in the limbs, but with his head on fire, he returned to the Rue des Bourdonnais. When he entered the old house where his abode was situated he saw no light in his daughter's window, and concluded that she had retired to rest.

Then he shut himself up to write to her, to Machefer, and to Lucien Bellefond, all those whom he loved. He wished to indite some parting words before he died.

For Thomas Vernède, now on the eve of bankruptcy, had fully made up his mind to kill himself.

Life, which he had been willing to face in poverty, he did not dare to face in disgrace.

His mind shrunk from a cowardly compromise. He could not brook the thought of enduring the slightest suspicion or humiliation.

He had been trained to the philosophical beliefs of the eighteenth

century, the ideas of the Rousseaus, the Voltaires, the Diderots, and the Condorcets ; and, now that he was ruined and degraded in his own eyes, he saw no refuge but suicide from the terrible catastrophe that threatened him.

He lacked the religious faith which might have consoled and sustained another, and he reasoned much in the same fashion as a Roman of the time of the Cæsars would have done.

He did not argue with himself that voluntary death, although it may be some expiation for an error—a transgression, does not by any means repair it, and he did not admit that there is more courage in living and striving to raise one's self again by suffering than in flying to the grave for shelter from sorrow or shame.

The idea of leaving Thérèse alone and without a protector had at first made him hesitate, but he firmly believed that he had secured her future happiness by leaving her temporarily in the care of Machefer, and by reminding Lucien that the unfortunate girl had no one but him to look to, and no hope but that of uniting her destiny with his. Both Machefer and Lucien, he felt certain, would nobly carry out the trust reposed in them.

As for himself, he wished to end his days before the Marquis de Baffey appeared to ask for the money which belonged to him, and which he (Vernède) was now unable to refund.

The office opened every morning punctually at nine o'clock. The banker had allowed himself till half-past eight, and the half hour had just that moment struck.

He had finished writing in a firm hand such instructions as he wished to leave to his cashier, and he rose up from his arm-chair to take his pistols from the wall, where they were hanging above a sword which he had worn during the Revolution, when he was wont to attend the Jacobin Club.

He had placed the pistols there on his return from the recent fatal expedition to the quarry at Montmartre. Now, however, on examining them he saw that the powder was damp, and that the rain which had poured in torrents that night had rusted the weapons to such an extent that they could not be used.

He had not time to clean them, for his pitiless creditor might appear at any moment. What should he do ?

As he stood there reflecting, his eyes suddenly fell upon the drawer in which he had placed the pistols which had been taken from Virginie Lasbayssès, when she was apprehended by the masons at the little house on the Chaussée de Clignancourt.

Lucien Bellefond had seen them in that same drawer, but without recognising them, on the day when he had come to ask for Thérèse's hand, and when the banker had told him that he was ruined ; they were still there, and seemed to be fitting instruments of punishment. ■

"They are in perfect order," said Vernède, bitterly. "I killed their owner, and now they will kill me. Heaven is just !"

Then going to the drawer he opened it and took out one of the weapons. Using the rod he at once ascertained that the pistol was loaded. As a precaution, however, he removed the cap and filled the pan with fresh powder. He did not wish to miss fire.

Still, before ending his life, he wanted once more to think of his dear child, and he now laid the pistol upon the table.

Some moments passed thus. All would have been silent, but for the sobs of the once inflexible leader of the masons, who was now weeping bitterly. One might have thought, perhaps, that strength of mind failed him to effect his purpose. But no ; for he presently wiped away the tears that streamed down his pale cheeks, and boldly stood up, saying : " It is time."

And, as he made ready to fire, he added : " That proud nobleman will soon be here. I can see his haughty face before me now, and hear the insolently-polite words that his disdainful lips will utter as he presents the note which is the cause of my death. However, he will find nothing here but my dead body."

Speaking these last words, Vernède firmly raised the pistol to his head.

The charge took fire, but the pistol did not go off.

" It is my destiny to bear every form of anguish ! " said Vernède, as he lowered his weapon again.

However brave a man my be, he cannot face death without experiencing some emotion, even when he is bent on self-destruction.

Thérèse's father had turned very pale ; and he now placed his hand upon his wildly beating heart, as if to stay its rapid pulsations.

" Did I spare that poor girl who brought Lucien a fortune—did I spare her any of the horrors of an atrocious death ? " he muttered. " No, I must not hesitate."

Then he seized the other pistol, but he saw that it was empty. Virginie had no doubt fancied that one loaded weapon would suffice for her protection.

Vernède at once set to work to load this second pistol, but found that his own bullets were too large to go into it. It seemed as though everything conspired to prevent him from killing himself.

Any other man, in his place, would have thought this to be an interposition of heaven.

But Thomas Vernède was a man of marble—free of all superstitious feeling.

Three of the pistols at hand were quite useless to enable him to carry out his determination. So he took up the fourth one, that which had already missed fire, and began to examine it, saying to himself with increased bitterness :

" At the worst, I have still my sword left to kill myself with."

He first examined the priming-pan. The powder he found was all burnt, but he now noticed with surprise that the touch-hole was not stopped up, as he had supposed. He then thought that the

charge must have become damp, although the pistol had been kept in a drawer.

His only resource was to take out the charge and reload the weapon with some dry powder and the same ball, which must be of the right size, as it was already in the barrel.

Acting on this determination, he took up a worm-screw, and began to unload the pistol. However, the steel teeth of the instrument soon came in contact with some paper, which resisted Vernède's endeavours to remove it from the barrel.

He involuntarily said to himself that poor Virginie could not have understood much about firearms, and he was wondering what she could have used to load this pistol, when, to his amazement, he found that his worm-screw was dragging out a roll of parchment.

At this he quivered from head to foot.

He hastily threw the pistol upon the table, and then began to unroll the parchment, but his feverish hands trembled so much that he could scarcely hold it.

What could this paper be which Zenobia Capitaine's niece had hidden in so strange a place? He did not know, and yet a feeling of hope had at last dawned upon his mind. He was like a shipwrecked man in mid-ocean who sees a ship afar off on the horizon.

At length he was able to unroll the parchment, and he then saw that it enclosed a yellowish strip of paper. He unfolded the latter, and as he did so, a cry escaped him.

"The colonel's will!"

For a moment or two he remained spell-bound; awed, as it were, by this singular discovery. Then with dim eyes he tremulously read these lines, written by the brave soldier, who had died of the wounds he had received at the battle of the Berezina:

"MILITARY HOSPITAL AT SMOLENSK,
5th Dec., 1812.

"Being mortally wounded, and about to appear before God, but still retaining the full exercise of my faculties, I hereby, of my own free will, appoint my nephew by marriage, Lucien Bellefond, the son of my wife's sister, and a sub-lieutenant in the 9th Light Cavalry, Mermel division, in the Army of Portugal, as my sole heir. I desire him to pay an annuity of five thousand francs a year to Zenobia Capitaine, a sutler-woman in the 19th Regiment of Artillery, which I command, in return for the devotion that she has shown me at all times. I confide this will to her that she may transmit it to my heir.

"PIERRE LACAUSSE,

Colonel of Artillery, and Commander of the Legion of Honour."

"Heaven has ordained a miracle!" said Thomas Vernède, as he finished his perusal.

Lucien was now rich. His betrothed, who would become his wife, need no longer fear poverty.

Thus Vernède could die in peace.

His involuntary crime was in a measure expiated, as Colonel Lacaussade's last wishes would now be fulfilled. However, Vernède still wished to punish himself for his transgression with death, and he stretched out his hand to take his sword from the wall, for this was now the only available weapon, the pistol which contained the parchment having no bullet inside it. At that moment, however, some one knocked at the door.

At this sound, which announced the coming of a visitor, Vernède started like a man awaking from a dream.

He looked at the clock and saw that he had let the time pass by. His fruitless preparations had lasted more than half-an-hour. It was already past nine o'clock. The office doors must have been opened, and it was, perhaps, the Marquis de Baffey who had just knocked.

Vernède might, if he pleased, refuse to open the door, and proceed with his mournful preparations—even kill himself while his enemy was trying to get in.

But the person who had just knocked might be his clerk, or even Thérèse, and he shrunk from the thought of letting the poor girl see his bloody corpse lying upon the floor.

He was appalled by the idea of letting her witness such a sight, and he therefore resolved to put off the fatal moment for a while. Walking towards the door, he unbolted it and flung it open. But it was not Thérèse who stood upon the threshold, nor was it even the little short-sighted, timid cashier.

Vernède, in lieu of either of these, beheld a man whom he did not recognise at first, so changed was he by suffering.

Disfigured, indeed, by the wound on his forehead, and blanched by illness, but still as upright and haughty as ever, Henry de Baffey politely removed his hat and entered.

"You have come, sir," said Vernède, turning pale with anger, as at last he recognised his dreaded visitor. "I expected you. I well knew that you would not delay enjoying your triumph for an instant. You have been waiting two months for it."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the Marquis de Baffey, quietly.

This was too much for the banker. The cooler M. de Baffey seemed, the more exasperated he (Vernède) became.

"You know very well what I mean," said he. "This is the 11th of September; it is nine o'clock; my office is open. So you have come to claim the money that you deposited with me. There is no use in your denying it. You know such to be the case as well as I do. Well, be satisfied; I am not able to return you those three hundred thousand francs. I have made use of a part of the amount to meet business payments, and I must have time to make up the full amount, if, indeed, I can do so at all. You have a right to say that I have acted dishonestly. Make use of that right—do not spare me. Treat me as your ancestors used to treat mine."

Then, seeing that M. de Baffey remained motionless and silent,

with no legible expression upon his pale face, the banker lost all self-control.

"What are you waiting for?" said he, maddened by his visitor's coolness, "what keeps you from casting my shame in my teeth? Spurn me! Curse me! Upbraid me! You need not fear that I shall ask you for any reparation for your insults. A debtor cannot fight with his creditor—we all know that—and I owe you three hundred thousand francs. A noble only fights with his equal, and not only am I not a noble, but in the eyes of the world—in yours especially—I am now not even an honest man."

At these words the Marquis de Baffey, still perfectly unruffled, took an elegant pocket-book from his pocket, drew from it a stamped bond, and tore the latter into fragments, which, without a word, he flung upon the floor.

"Ah! I understand!" exclaimed Vernède, bitterly, "it is all very well for a man of the people to insult an enemy; a gentleman takes a more refined vengeance. Such is the result of good breeding and a patrician ancestry! You might reproach me for abusing your confidence, but you prefer to crush me with your scornful generosity. But no; I am mistaken. You are not so generous as all that. You came here intending to propose a bargain to me, did you not? My daughter for that bond, eh? It is really too much honour that you are doing me, and I ought to fall on my knees to thank you."

He paused at last, almost choking, for his feelings were too much for him.

"I see, sir," now said the marquis, coldly, "that your troubles have upset your mind. If I had entertained the odious purpose of which you accuse me, I should not have destroyed the receipt upon which such a plan would have been founded."

"Why not?" answered Vernède, scornfully. "Don't you know that my books show the debt? A merchant, a banker, as you must be well aware, is held liable in accordance with the entries in his ledger. Do you believe me to be duped by your pretended generosity?"

M. de Baffey started, but succeeded in controlling himself, and did not utter a word.

"Well, then," resumed the banker, who was beside himself with rage, "I take up the glove you have thrown down. The greater part of the money due to you is still in my safe. It shall be given to you at once. There are one hundred and seventy thousand francs, I should think. It has suited you to tear up the bond. All right. Now, however, you must sign a receipt for the money I will hand to you. If you refuse, I will force you to do so by law. The rest will soon be paid to you, and on the day when I am no longer your debtor, you will not refuse to fight with me, I trust—unless, indeed, you make your noble birth a pretext for not fighting with a man of the people."

"My nobility only recoils from base actions," replied the marquis, proudly raising his head.

"Then you will fight with me?" ejaculated Vernède. "Very well; I thank you! Whatever may be the result of our meeting, I shall not have to endure your insulting proposals. When a man has fought another, he cannot seek to marry that man's daughter."

"Do not be alarmed, sir," replied the officer of the Black Musketeers. "I have ceased wishing to marry Mademoiselle Vernède since I have known that she is betrothed to Monsieur Lucien Bellefond, who loves her, and whom she loves."

"Bellefond!" exclaimed the banker, again flying into a passion, "you dare to talk of Bellefond? Well, then, yes—you have named the man whom my daughter prefers, and whom she will marry, let the vile agents of the government which you serve condemn him or not to perpetual imprisonment; yes, even if the scoundrels who govern us have the infamy to send him to the scaffold—he will still marry her, ay, marry her at the foot of the guillotine! The brave soldier to whom Thérèse is betrothed is not a noble, thank heaven! While you were living in Germany or England, at the court of your king, he was fighting for France. Yes! For France—betrayed by the men who came back in the baggage waggons of the allies! And, what is more, since the Bourbons, in return for his valour, rewarded his services by depriving him of his position in the army, he saved your life. But for him you would have perished miserably upon a deserted highway! You might have remembered that!"

"I do not think that I have forgotten it," replied M. de Baffey, quietly.

"Indeed!" said Vernède, whom the unchangeable coolness of the marquis exasperated more and more. "You don't know, perhaps, that, after having removed you from the deserted spot where you would have died but for his help, Monsieur Bellefond was followed by a spy—one of those ignoble scamps who work for any master—royal, imperial, or republican—and he was arrested under the absurd pretext of having fought with a Prussian officer?"

"I am quite aware of that, sir."

"You knew it, then? Well, I ought to have guessed that you did," retorted Vernède, in an ironical tone of voice. "You knew it, and you thought, no doubt with delight, that your Minister of the Police had rid you of a troublesome adversary or rival. Any other man, a man of the people like myself, would have gone to ask for the release of his enemy, if only to be on equal terms with him. You, however, are of a more practical turn of mind. You said to yourself that the arrest of my partner, who was about to become my son-in-law, would leave me without resources and also leave my daughter without a protector."

The royalist officer's eyes flashed, but he did not stir or break his disdainful silence.

"Well, in these pleasant surmises of yours you were mistaken, sir," resumed the banker. "I am here to defend my daughter, and Monsieur Bellefond, my partner, will now be able to keep the engagements which we entered into together, for he is rich, as rich as yourself."

"I am very pleased to hear it, sir," replied the Marquis de Baffey, haughtily.

"And you may be sure," said Vernède, "that his imprisonment will not prevent him from helping me and marrying my daughter. Your party may be paramount, but harsh as your rule may be, your power does not, so far as I know, extend to the point of depriving a French citizen of his right of inheritance, and here is the will of a brave officer—a colonel of artillery—who died fighting your allies, the Russians, and this will makes Monsieur Lucien Bellefond, who is the colonel's nephew by marriage, the sole heir to a fortune of more than two millions of francs. This fortune is now his own, and he will soon have possession of it, for, however bitter our enemies may be, they cannot keep him in prison for ever on account of a duel."

With these words the banker again gave his adversary a defiant look.

"Especially as it was fairly and honourably conducted," replied the Marquis de Baffey. "Two English officers, who were the seconds of Monsieur Bellefond's antagonist, have formally stated that the code of honour was scrupulously complied with."

"Ah! then you admit it!" exclaimed the banker, delighted at having wrung this admission from his adversary; "you do not deny that he will be free some day, and then——"

"He is free now."

"What do you mean? What do you know about it?" asked Vernède, in utter astonishment.

"I mean," answered the Marquis de Baffey, in his cold but impressive voice; "I mean that I entreated the King to do justice to an officer who was accused of an imaginary crime, and that His Majesty, having made some inquiries with regard to Lieutenant Bellefond, was graciously pleased to give orders that he should be set at liberty. The order for his release was signed yesterday at an audience which His Majesty granted me at the Palace of the Tuileries."

"That is impossible!" exclaimed the banker. "Lucien would have come to me at once."

"I do not think that he will be long in coming," replied the marquis, smiling for the first time since the beginning of the interview.

Indeed, as he spoke a hurried step was heard in the outer office. Then suddenly the door was hastily re-opened, and Lucien threw himself into the arms of Thérèse's father.

Vernède pressed him warmly to his breast, but speedily dis-

engaging himself, he pointed to M. de Baffey with a gesture of interrogation.

The banker still doubted ; his plebeian pride was so great that it revolted against the evidence before him, overwhelming as it was.

The fact is, after owing his life and the discovery of the colonel's will to a miracle, he rebelled against the idea of owing Lucien's liberty to a nobleman. It seemed like the annihilation of all his principles—his firmly-set irreligious views, and his long-existent hatred of the aristocracy. And even if he bowed himself before the Providence that had so evidently interposed in the matter of the will, at least he longed to be able to remain erect and defiant in the presence of a scion of that nobility which he had so long detested.

Lucien, however, did not hesitate.

"Marquis," said he, in an agitated tone. "Thanks to your efforts I have been relieved from prison. I do not know whether you are still my enemy, but I am not yours, and I should be glad and proud to shake hands with you."

The officer of the Black Musketeers at once held out his hand to Lieutenant Bellefond, and then, offering the other to the banker, he said, with a sad smile, which bore, as it were, the trace of a vanished hope :

"Are you still angry with me for coming to see you ?"

This was said so frankly and gracefully that Vernède no longer resisted. For the first time in his life he clasped the hand of one of those aristocrats of whom, in the Days of Terror, he had helped to send so many to the guillotine !

XXII.

AFTER the scene of reconciliation which took place on that morning of the 11th of September—that morning which had dawned so sadly, but which had so happy an end, Vernède had to thank heaven for holding him back from self-destruction.

Thérèse and Lucien also blessed Providence for its mercies, and their first thought was to offer up their prayers.

The following day was devoted to the generous man who had asked for and obtained the release of Lieutenant Bellefond. The situation was undoubtedly an embarrassing one as regards all three of the persons who had reason to be grateful to the Marquis de Baffey. It does not appear, however, that Thérèse was called upon to go and thank the suitor who had given up seeking her in marriage. She did not care to see him, much as she was pleased with his conduct; and finally it was arranged that she should not take any personal action in the matter.

Lucien also felt some embarrassment about expressing his gratitude to his rival, although he admitted that, without the powerful influence of the marquis, he might have remained in prison for a long time; and, indeed, had the traitor Cyrille spoken out, he would not have escaped with mere imprisonment. He also understood M. de Baffey's generosity in destroying the bond for the three hundred thousand francs, instead of turning it to account as regards Vernède's intentions concerning his daughter.

However, pride is the most unconquerable of all human passions. Others may be conquered or controlled, but this one exercises a mastery which can seldom be shaken off. If Lucien had been the loser in the struggle that had now ended, he would not have hesitated to go and thank his liberator. But he was the conqueror, and he did not like to go and thank the marquis in person. Such is the human heart, even when it is what we call a good one. Thus in the result Lucien contented himself with writing the marquis a letter in which, in tolerably fitting terms, he thanked him for his timely intervention.

However, among those whom Henri de Baffey had obliged, there was one who fully did his duty, painful as it was, and he was not the least proud, nor had he been the least humiliated. Thomas Vernède, however, for a time forgot that he had been a Jacobin, and remembered all that he owed to the aristocrat whom he had so fiercely hated.

The old Republican rightly considered that, without giving up his

life-long opinions, he might repair to the Countess des Orgeries' mansion in the Rue de Varennes; and, indeed, he went there, and was glad to press once more the hand which the royalist officer had first held out to him at his office.

That day the whilom Grand Master of the "Brethren of the Trowel" showed that he was a man of a superior nature. He had transgressed more than once in the course of his long life. He had been exclusive in his opinions, stern and unrelenting as regards the furtherance of his political aims, but now, by willingly acknowledging his errors, he did much to atone for the events of the past.

It is superfluous to add that the marquis, who was a man of perfect breeding, received the banker, not only with the respect due to him, but with fitting regard for their mutual situation, showing him those delicate attentions which no longer prevail in French society, now that so much is said about the "rights of man."

The marquis, in spite of his cold manners, was really an enthusiast, and even an idealist, as the first Napoleon somewhat contemptuously called all those who allowed themselves to think and to feel. The great conqueror himself believed in action only.

Henri de Baffey reconciled his poetic tendencies with his English manners by going, some years later, to fight for Greece, in the company of his friend, Lord Byron; and, like the latter, he was killed at Missolonghi. Then the old name of the Baffeys, famous since the days of the Crusades, glowing, as it did, on almost every page of French history, died out. Nought but the record of a long line of statesmen, warriors, and courtiers remained to attest the whilom power and splendour of one of the noblest families in Christendom.

The Countess des Orgeries, Henri's aunt, survived him, to her sorrow, and witnessed the downfall of the Bourbons of the elder branch, when King Charles X., misled by the advice of the narrow-minded, image-worshipping Prince de Polignac, was hurled from the throne by the latter-day disciples of that dear Jean Jacques Rousseau, whom she—Madame des Orgeries—had known so well and admired so much in the days when she was the belle of Versailles.

Fate was kinder to the Vernède family.

Money (whatever people may say against it) straightens all difficulties, and Lucien, now the heir to more than two millions of francs, did not need to wait to realise his uncle's property.

That credit which the unfortunate banker had lost was eagerly offered him as soon as it was known that his partner had inherited so large a fortune. Only the rich can borrow, says the proverb, and such indeed is the law here below.

Thus the formidable payments due at the end of September were met without any difficulty; and two months later, M. de Baffey had received his money. The year 1816, moreover, enhanced the prosperity of the banking business of Messrs. Vernède and Bellefond.

But before then the betrothed couple were married. The wedding ceremony took place on the 15th of October, 1815, on Saint Thérèse's-day.

"I told you, mademoiselle, that you would have some flowers on your birthday, and handsomer ones than you had last year," remarked poor *Æsop*, when he saw the bride's wreath arrive.

The little humpback had had so much to do with the unexpected events to which the young couple owed their happiness, that they felt very grateful to him, and proved it in a substantial way.

However, there was some one else who deserved to be well remembered by the Vernède family. That was Zenobia Capitaine, who had brought the colonel's precious will from Russia. She was still in prison in Périgueux at the time when Thomas Vernède so miraculously found the missing will. However, it is necessary to say that Lucien Bellefond lost no time in negotiating for the release of the colonel's faithful envoy. Vernède personally applied to M. de Baffey, and the latter, setting to work again, thanks to his influence, the Minister of the Interior gave orders to the prefect of Dordogne to release the prisoner, against whom there was, in point of fact, no important charge.

Less than a week after the catastrophe in the quarry at Montmartre, Timoléon Machefer left Paris by coach, bound for Périgueux, and not with any suspicious persons on this occasion, for he had no Trimoulac-Loupjac or Saint-Privat-Bonnin to fear, as they had both gone to another world. Nor had he any reason, on this journey, to disguise his errand. His mission was now one that he could freely acknowledge, and there was no necessity for him to pretend that he was going to purchase a large supply of those invigorating esculents--the far-famed truffles of Périgord.

During the following week he brought back the sutler-woman in triumph, for she had made no difficulty about leaving Périgueux, nor did it take her long to get ready to start for Paris.

Zenobia had travelled all over Europe during the previous fifteen years, and she knew how to get ready in very little time. She left her native city just as she had been wont to break up camp, when she followed the grand army on its conquering pilgrimage through the continent; and she did not experience any regret in turning her back upon the truffle capital; for she cared but little for the relatives whom she left behind her there.

It may well be imagined that she was warmly received by Lucien and his new family. Still, this much-desired meeting brought up very sad recollections.

The lamentable story of Virginie Lasbaysses had already been made known to Zenobia by Machefer, and the good woman could not allude without tears to the fate of the courageous girl, who had devoted herself to the task of delivering the will to the lieutenant, and had lost her life in the attempt.

Zenobia was in a position to supply various details which enabled

her friends to understand the more mysterious part of what had occurred, leading to the tragic result with which they were well acquainted.

It appeared from Zenobia's narrative that, after receiving the forged letter which the vile Trimoulac had had the audacity to sign with Bellefond's name, the aunt and the niece had consulted and made a plan.

This plan was to the effect that Virginie should dress herself as a man, and thus start for Paris, it being understood that nobody should be made acquainted with her intention.

Accordingly, when the young girl had donned her masculine disguise she went to wait for the mail-coach at some distance from the town, and no one saw her leave.

It was she who, in her aunt's name, had written the letter which had been addressed to Lucien Bellefond, and opened by the spying director of the dark room. It was she, too, who had read Zenobia the false letter from Trimoulac signed with Lucien's name.

Upon leaving Périgueux, she had told Zenobia that she would surely be able to find the house in Paris which the letter spoke of, and that she would hide the will in such a way that Lucien's enemies would never be able to steal it. Unfortunately, however, that was all that she had said. She had not even written on her arrival in the capital ; and ever since bidding her God-speed, Zenobia had been left in a state of anxious suspense.

If the sutler-woman had known that the will had been secreted in one of the pistols that her niece was carrying in her pockets, she would certainly have told this to Machefer when he went to see her in prison ; Machefer, on his return, would have acquainted Vernède with the circumstance, and Vernède, in his turn, would not have taken that dangerous journey to the quarries, nor on the morrow have attempted to blow out his brains.

The information that Zenobia was able to impart went no further than this, but the three friends had no difficulty in guessing what had subsequently occurred.

Virginie Lasbaysses had gone to Paris ; and had there inquired the way to the Chaussée de Clignancourt, where she believed that Lucien Bellefond was awaiting her in a house which the spurious letter specified.

She reached this house ; she found the doors open ; but the place was empty.

The Chevalier de Loupiac had been there, indeed, a few moments before and had gone away, intending to return very soon, as he had left the keys in the doors and a lighted lamp on the table of a room on the ground-floor.

Virginie bravely entered this room, and finding and seeing no one there, she had at once concluded that Lucien had been obliged to go away a few moments previously, and would speedily return.

She had therefore seated herself at the table, and had laid her pistols down beside the lamp; for, being unaccustomed to carrying such things about her person, she had found them somewhat in her way.

Then at last, weary of waiting, she had become anxious and impatient, wondering what it all meant. And finally she had taken the idea of writing to the governor of Paris, asking him to tell her where she would find Lieutenant Bellefond, for she had begun to doubt whether this house were really his abode. Then the masons came upon her at the very moment when she was writing the first words of her missive.

That fatal letter had contributed to doom her to death, for the Grand Master had conjectured that it was intended for the Minister of Police instead of the military Governor of Paris. The conspirators had made a fatal mistake in meting out their "justice," and the frightful consequences of the error were beyond repair.

Virginie Lasbaysses was sincerely lamented, as she deserved to be, and Thérèse, prompted by a pious feeling, placed a cross outside the Butte Montmartre, which was her tomb.

Æsop was taken by Machefer into his employ, and finally, as time went on, he took the place of Frantz, the old cashier, who had to retire on account of his failing sight. Indeed, in the course of time when Machefer retired, it was Æsop who took over the business.

As for the fair Clarisse, she consoled herself more easily for the disappearance of her respectable parent than for Lucien's marriage. And yet the disappearance of that nice old gentleman, M. Bonfin, furnished during a time matter for no little comment between his daughter, his housekeeper, and Carrots. None of them could understand what had become of him; and, as he had left in the company of the wary Cornillon and the strong-armed Bourdache, neither of whom, moreover, had ever returned, he ought to have been in a position to defend himself against any attack. Madame Boutard was aware that the trio had started on some expedition concerning the missing will, but she had not been made acquainted with their precise destination. After a while they were forgotten, all efforts to find any traces of them having proved unavailing.

They still sleep within the height of Montmartre, and some day it may happen that workmen, engaged in digging the foundations of a house, will come upon their bones, lying near those of the muscular Tranquebar and the scoundrelly Trimoulac—the latter of whom was mourned for a brief season by Zoé de Sainte-Gauburge.

But, to return to Clarisse, art at last enabled her to forget the impression which Lucien Bellefond's manly comeliness had made upon her susceptible nature. After vainly trying to become a painter, she took up music, and, by the advice of Madame Boutard, the former Goddess of Reason, she came out during the following year at the Théâtre des Nouveautés, and obtained a success with which it was said, however, her beauty had a great deal to do.

As for the sutler-woman, who has given her name to this veracious narrative, she had fairly earned the colonel's legacy and a quiet life. She found one in the house of the two partners, who, thanks to Providence, had now no need to ask : "Where's Zenobia?"

Lucien and Thérèse lived long and happily after the dramatic events which we have described ; and there is no reason for us to relate what happened to them during the years that followed. It is only misfortune that leaves a record—happiness has no history.

END OF "WHERE'S ZENOBIA?"

THE NECKLACE.

I.

It was the first day a ray of sunshine had fallen on Paris for many weeks, one of those rare days when the air is so diaphanous, the sky so pure, that it seems as if there were happiness in the world for everybody—one of those blessed days, indeed, when there are no longer any rich nor any poor, when there is neither luxury nor poverty, nothing but human beings whose sole desire is to have their share in the Spring. Thus all Paris betook itself to the railway stations, of which that in the Rue Saint-Lazare was not the least crowded. Horses and people were hastening towards it, bringing new recruits to the feast of the sun. Those who, from the top of the flight of steps, were looking at this joyous sight while awaiting the opening of the ticket offices, remarked an elegant victoria which came up at a fast trot and suddenly stopped in front of the steps. A slenderly-formed young woman alighted from this vehicle, went towards the ticket-office, and then continued on her way to the waiting-room, leaving behind her the noise of rustling silk.

The bell rung as the signal for departure just at that moment.

"Open the door, I beg of you! Open it!" said the young woman, knocking on the door, which a railway inspector shut in her face.

A shrill whistle announced to her that her persistence had become useless. The train had started. Then, like a bird in a cage, the charming woman began to walk up and down the waiting-room, which had become almost deserted. Her small, narrow, well-shaped feet tapped the floor impatiently, as though she were anxious to make it aware of the unheard-of mischance which had befallen her.

In spite of the rather exaggerated coquetry of this pretty woman, her brisk and audacious step, one recognised by her haughty manner, and the straight line of her brows, which were slightly contracted, the insolent self-confidence of a patrician. Her toilette, wonderfully elegant, was albeit slightly conspicuous, as if indeed she feared to pass unobserved. Under her almost imperceptible bonnet the bright red of a spray of fuchsias relieved the golden hue of her hair, playing in little loose curls on her brow. The brilliancy of her eyes and the rosy tint of her complexion completed a most charming picture.

The waiting-room had begun to fill again, but the young woman continued her walk without caring for the eye-glasses that were examining her, when all at once a faint perfume that suddenly filled the air, and a cadenced rustle of trailing skirts—a rhythmed echo of her own—attracted her attention.

It is certain that the entrance of a woman into a drawing-room has a more serious interest for the feminine guests than it has for you, dear reader of the sterner sex, or for me. At the rival's approach weary looks suddenly brighten up, mouths are curved into a malicious smile, drooping forms are drawn up: like a horseman upright in his stirrups, and making ready to charge the enemy, thus indifferent beauties become animated in presence of a struggle.

"Marthe!" exclaimed a lady who had now entered the waiting-room.

"Lucie!" answered the young woman who had missed the train.

And four of the handsomest eyes in the world shone with a joyful surprise. At first only a duet of silvery notes mingling together was heard:

"How pretty you are!"

"And you, too!"

"How ungrateful you have been!"

"Dear Marthe!"

And a pair of black eyes were fixed on a pair of blue ones with as much curiosity as pleasure.

"Have I not looked enough for you? Yes, indeed. Marthe could not console herself for Lucie's departure. But meanwhile, mademoiselle got married without giving any warning, and went off, heaven knows where, on her honeymoon. However, suppose we kiss each other?"

"Here?"

"Why not?"

The young woman to whom these words were addressed was of a different style of beauty to her friend. The outline of her small nose bespoke pride. One's look was attracted to the pearly whiteness of her complexion, full of soft, tender lights; to a childish mouth, an oval face, accompanied by a wealth of chestnut-coloured hair. She was youth in its bloom, although a slight dark circle surrounded her eyes. She had a round figure, delicately-formed wrists and ankles, and her toilette was exquisitely simple, without the least mark of eccentricity. Withal she wore an air of reserve and timidity.

"Ah! where did you hide yourself, madame?" continued the mischievous Marthe. "Oh, you need not blush. I know what it is. But our honeymoon only lasted the proper time. Three months of forced seclusion. It is nice—but it is enough. At the bottom of his heart my husband thought as I did. He has all my faults. You will see him, he is splendidly ugly. And yours? Have you taken the archangel Saint Michael from his niche? You know that copy of

Raphael with which we were all in love? Don't be uneasy, if he has brown hair I won't tell him of it——"

"Do you always make fun of everything?"

"More than ever. Ah! there is my brother. See, over there, that man with an open waistcoat and his moustache turned up. He does not dare to come here. Is he not absurd with his solemn looks? But, now I think of it, he will be furious."

"Furious? Why?"

"Because I promised you to him; don't you remember it? George, my brother George, whom I intended you to marry? But you look pre-occupied. Are you waiting for your husband?"

"Yes."

"I am dying to make his acquaintance to overwhelm him with reproaches. Ah, the jealous fellow! Does he think he is going to monopolise you? Ah! there is the train now. I must be off. Quick! give me your address. Mine is 50 Boulevard Malesherbes. Oh! lucky chance, without that second's delay, who knows if we should ever have found each other again? I bless that inspector who wouldn't let me pass. Ah! here's my brother. George, I want to present you to my friend Lucie. You remember Lucie?"

Then turning towards her friend:

"You frighten my brother. It seems he finds you grown. Come and see me on Wednesday, my dear, that's my day—it is agreed, eh?"

II.

ABOUT a fortnight after this meeting, Lucie de Sudres was announced at the Countess du Plessy's house. The two young women were to breakfast together. Lucie found the little countess still nestled in her blue satin bed; a ball-dress was spread over the ottoman; a box of pearl powder stood open; a bouquet of white lilac still exhaled its sweet perfume. Jewels and pearls, ribbons and laces formed a bright heap on the little desk. The room was a perfect chaos; amid the hangings of silk and guipure one perceived bits of brilliant carved furniture, jewels, faïences, bronzes, and enamels.

This elegant disorder made a singular impression on Lucie. In the presence of this luxurious comfort, her own room, hung with simple chintz, appeared to her disagreeably mean with its simple characteristics.

"I am really ashamed to be still a-bed!" exclaimed Marthe, stretching her arms. "Will you ring, dearest?"

A maid appeared almost immediately, carrying a pink silk wrapper bordered with fur, into which the pretty, sleepy woman slipped like a cat, while pointing to two large well-padded arm-chairs, covered with some silken material, which the maid rolled in front of the fire-place.

Then between the two friends there began one of these desultory conversations, of which women alone possess the secret.

"Ah!" said Marthe, suddenly, "what toilet are you going to wear at my ball?"

Lucie began to laugh.

"Obstinate child! I have already told you that I do not go into society," said she.

"You will come to my entertainment. If it is necessary, I will go and throw myself at the feet of the great master."

"Oh! don't do that, above all things. Léonce might think that I wished it!"

"Great harm there would be in that!"

"Because he would yield."

"I rely upon his doing so."

"But I do not wish it."

"Your reasons, please?"

"I mistrust myself. I feel that I could love society and its pleasures madly, and that if I once tasted of them I should not know how to stop."

"And why should you stop?"

"You reason like a little countess who has a hundred thousand francs a year. But the wife of an ill-paid functionary, without any fortune, should think, and above all, act differently."

"It is singular; you used only to sketch out golden dreams. How did you happen to marry a man without any money? For I remember all the fairy tales of your imagination. How many times you used to astonish us at the convent with the fantastic descriptions of the splendours of your future home!"

"Dear me! it is very simple. I loved Léonce."

"That reason is as good as any other," said the countess, smiling; "but let us return to my ball."

"Well, you will tell Léonce that you exacted it of me."

"That will be the truth."

"But, above all, never speak to him of my school fancies. He would be so unhappy to know that I had any tastes that it would be impossible for him to satisfy."

"From all this I gather that your husband has placed you in a niche, and that the saint holds to her pedestal! I, on the contrary, tell Max everything that comes into my mind. Yes, all! And I don't hide the *great* sins under the *little ones*, as you used to do with our good father confessor. In a word, he is obliged to love me, because—in fact, in spite of everything!"

At the breakfast this grave discussion was continued.

III.

LÉONCE DE SUDRES, Lucie's husband, was far from being handsome, like little Baron George, Marthe's brother, and although he did not possess the "splendid ugliness" of the countess's better-half, and did

not in anywise resemble the archangel Saint Michael—the young woman's first ideal—he was nevertheless a very desirable husband. He possessed, it is true, rather the robust vigour of a provincial than the elegant masher manners of a Parisian. His broad shoulders were surmounted by a curly brown head and smiling face, all the features of which were expressive of good health, a good conscience, and good humour. Moreover, his mind was cultivated. Brought up in the country by his somewhat austere father until he entered the Polytechnic School, he had retained modest habits and studious tastes. If he was not a stranger to pleasure during his sojourn in Paris, at least he lived there in such a way as never to know the sad boredom of satiety. Besides, a sweet and charming memory served him as a shield; a child whom he had almost rocked in her cradle, and whom he dreamed of making his life's companion: this was Lucie, who, educated at a convent in Paris, had returned home at about the same time as he was appointed civil engineer.

Léonce only possessing his salary, and Lucie having merely an income of a few thousand francs as her dowry, their union had met with serious opposition from their parents. But obstacles fell before their love and before their reasonable plans. "They would live retired; far away from society and its costly obligations; they would resist all temptation in the way of pleasure and vanity. Lucie was so pretty, did she need any setting off to her beauty? Léonce was so charming, why should his wife seek aught beyond the happiness she was sure to find in her own home!"

They were married. Circumstances, however, soon wrought a change in the modest plans formed by the young couple. After a short stay in the country, Léonce was called to a post in Paris. This post, which would have been so enviable a one for many others, upset Léonce's plans for a retired life, and when the young people left for the capital they prayed for a speedy return to the provinces.

They took an apartment in the Avenue de Neuilly, outside the city. Thus only distant sounds of society would reach them; they would still live, so to speak, in the country.

Faithful in every way to the programme they had traced out for themselves, they only went to the Bois "at the lovers' hour," in order to breathe the perfume of a lovely evening, not to exhibit toilettes. Léonce there chose from preference the shady paths where one can walk arm-in-arm without having to think of the passers-by.

Sometimes they went to the theatre, but it was for the play itself, and not for the audience. Lucie was indifferent, at least, in appearance, to the renown of figuring at first performances together with "all Paris."

It was after two years of this secluded existence, during which not a cloud had come to dim their blue sky, that the young woman met her dearest school friend, Marthe du Plessy, at the Saint-Lazare railway station.

IV.

ON the evening of the ball given by Marthe, Lucie arrived early, as had been agreed, in order to assist her friend in her duties of hostess. The countess was still occupied with her toilette.

"How do you find me?" Lucie asked her, throwing a glance at the mirror. "I ask that," she added in a lower tone, "because excepting the fête of Sainte-Catherine at the convent, this is my first appearance at a ball."

As she protruded her little feet shod in satin towards the fire, a sensation of coldness on her bent neck, drew a faint cry from her.

"See!" exclaimed Marthe, laughing, "this is the first time that a diamond necklace ever frightened a woman. It is a present from my husband, my dear, for the anniversary of our marriage. Is he not gallant? And how beautiful it is! Ah! how it becomes you! Look at yourself!"

If a reproach could have been made to Lucie's beauty, it could only have been that it possessed less brilliancy and perfection than the ornament. The diamonds, which threw the lustre of their light on the rather dull whiteness of her skin, lent her an ideal brilliancy. With her eyes softening with pleasure, she passed her trembling fingers over the facets of each stone. It seemed as though she could not take her eyes from them. Marthe smiled.

"Wear it this evening," she said.

"What are you thinking of?"

"Why should you not keep it on? I did not intend to wear it. I am in my own house, and here is a set of jewels which will harmonise much better with my toilette and the necessary simplicity of the occasion."

"Ah! my dear," said Lucie, bending backwards to judge of the effect of her train, "there is nothing like a ball-dress for showing off a woman's beauty!"

Do you think, reader, that any one can be in love with a necklace? This unheard-of thing happened, however, to Lucie. She trembled every minute at the contact of the luminous stones which in the wild motion of the waltz rose and fell on her neck, as she would have done at a kiss or a bite; a sort of madness carried her away rather than her light feet, and as she passed the large Venetian mirrors, her eyes threw at them shining glances which rivalled with the rays of the jewels, the cause of her intoxication.

The ball was splendid. The countess's fêtes were justly renowned for their magnificence and their good taste. Doubtless the atmosphere of elegance, the music, and the flowers, contributed to intoxicate Lucie, who beheld all this for the first time.

At last Léonce went to tell her that it was getting late.

"So soon?" she said.

However, without adding another word, she took her husband's

arm and went with him into Marthe's boudoir. Then, while Léonce went to find a maid, she approached the mirror and give herself that look that all young women give as they leave a ball, to see if their beauty has kept all its promises to the last.

At this moment a slight noise disturbed her.

"Who is there?" she asked, for the room was half-dark. "Who is there?" she repeated.

"Excuse me," said Baron George, rising and going towards her. "I am afraid I seem very indiscreet. I was resting here dreaming, waiting for the waltz you promised me."

"And you went to sleep?"

"No, madame; but with my eyes shut I was following a dream. And the hoped-for waltz could alone have had the power to drag me from it; at its first notes I opened my eyes and saw you. Will you take my arm?"

"I beg your pardon; we are getting ready to leave."

"What, without paying your debts?"

"My husband——"

"What is it, my dear?" asked Léonce, who now entered the room again.

"I was begging madame to fulfil her engagements," said the baron.

"I am really a little tired. Good-bye, Monsieur George; excuse me," she said, stretching out her hand to the young man, who held it a little longer than was necessary before he returned to the drawing-room.

Lucie went and stood in front of her husband, bending before him her pretty neck, over which a quantity of little brown curls clustered. Like a loving husband, Léonce only understood one thing by this gesture, and he printed a long kiss on his wife's neck.

"But do you not see the clasp there?" And the young woman's delicate fingers felt impatiently for the clasp of the necklace.

"Ah! excuse me, dear. I forgot that glass-ware, which you love this evening better than your husband."

"But do take it off," continued Lucie, almost vehemently, for her nerves were decidedly over-excited.

From that day, a thousand good reasons were always at hand for breaking up the plans of retirement at first formed by Monsieur and Madame de Sudres. Were the latter's secret wishes felt by her husband? or was he himself, without knowing it, flattered by his young wife's success?

They spent the winter amid pleasure of all kinds. Lucie seemed resigned to the prospect of a fixed appointment in Paris; she even attempted to show her husband that the difficulties of housekeeping, which at first had so frightened them, were greatly exaggerated. It was only necessary to know the secrets of Parisian life, and the latter, once well studied by an intelligent woman, furnished unexpected solutions. She trusted, in a short time, to be able to balance her budget without undergoing many privations, and also without

prejudice to the requirements of their situation in life. She understood now how her husband's future might be helped on from the connections they would surely make by cultivating society. All the petty Government intrigues, the speedy advancements had formerly so puzzled them ; but of all those Parisian mysteries Lucie now had the key. And what city was as indulgent as Paris as regards people's means ? And how many resources it possessed of all kinds ! Not only as regards material life, which, all things considered, was less costly than in the provinces, but also in reference to the question of dress, this latter not being the least important. In fact, in Paris there were none of those narrow rivalries which oblige one to keep a double entry of all politenesses received and to be returned. And besides all these reasons—of doubtful value, in truth—did not Léonce risk seeing his powers wasted and his talents forgotten in a provincial town ?

Persuasion is feminine and knows how to become both specious and amiable. The two families, now inseparable, gaily looked forward to the approaching spring. George de Valrens, Marthe's brother, without making himself a nuisance, knew how to be always ready with some new pleasure. He it was who got up little dinners at the restaurants, who offered the wished-for box at the talked-of first performance, who was the gay element at all their parties, the scapegrace that was always scolded, but whose follies always amused. Did he not always bring a harvest of chit-chat with him, which the two curious women listened to with half-closed ears, amused to hear of matters pertaining to another world ?

About this time Lucie discovered quite a treasure of a maid. Was it owing to her clever and economical help that she was able to rival her friend in elegance ? At all events, better informed now than the Countess Marthe on the weak points of the fashionable dressmaker, and on the principal qualities of the bonnet-maker of the day, she might have given clever and instructive lectures to the brilliant circle that sets the fashion.

It is whispered that more than one "artist," very justly enamoured of his art, dresses, simply for renown's sake, some pretty worldlings fitted to show off their toilets to the best advantage. Was this Lucie's secret ? We would rather suppose that, skilful in imitating a good cut and a happy combination of colours, and that by attending the cheap sales which such and such shops advertised on certain days, she had at last contrived to solve the problem that had seemed so terrible to her at the opening of this story.

V.

It was the beginning of April, a most brilliant time of the year for the Bois de Boulogne. Every day at about four o'clock Lucie and Marthe went there together. Léonce, meanwhile, devoted himself

to his work. Ambitious for his wife's sake, he hoped some day to be able to give her the luxuries that suited her so well. Although the trees were still leafless, their branches, ruddy and full of sap, gave forth a promise of the approaching Spring, and sweet scents and brightness began to fill the air. Every one was making plans for the summer, and while a last moment was given to balls, the attention of society was centred in the coming steeplechases that were to open the racing season.

Idly reclining on the cushions of an elegant landau, Lucie abandoned herself to the charm of being looked at and envied ; with her little hand in a lilac glove leaning on the edge of the carriage, she beat the time of a favourite operetta tune while she and her friend planned a round of fresh pleasures. Behind them rode George on his thoroughbred horse, and with a white camelia at his button-hole. He came to the carriage door from time to time, and spurred up his horse to show off his well-known talents as a rider.

"Are you not coming to-morrow?" said Marthe to Lucie.

"I think you can rely on me," the latter answered, drawing herself up, and displaying her slender and supple figure : "Léonce can go by himself to Nantes. Why do you smile?"

"I was thinking to myself how completely I have converted you to my way of thinking that so scandalised you a year ago, Ah ! if the victims of matrimony only knew how to lengthen their chains there would be fewer breaks. Listen to the clause I made my future husband agree to without a word of argument. Ah ! I made my programme before the '*fatal yes*:' well, that programme was equal liberty, and absolute mutual independence."

Just then the horses started off at a fast trot. Was it their quickened pace and the heightened breeze that had sprung up around the carriage that so suddenly animated Lucie's complexion? Fortunately her veil, which fell in long folds behind her, was blown forward and hid her face.

It is said that a woman's heart is a labyrinth full of dark corners, and that no man is able to lay hold of the guiding thread that would lead him through this maze. Did Marthe, as a woman, read her friend's heart? At all events she added :

"This is anything but a reproach, dear. I only wished to point out the truth of the axiom : 'The tamer is always at last devoured by the lion.'"

"But I do not quite see the analogy——"

"Why, nature triumphs over education ; the lion is your character, the tamer, a weak woman's good resolutions, and—you know the rest."

"What on earth are you talking so seriously about?" interrupted George, coming up at this moment.

"Marthe is giving me a lecture on philosophy," replied Lucie.

"Then I shall ride away."

"Who are you betting on to-morrow?" now asked the young woman, turning towards the baron.

"Vesta, she's the favourite; will you go halves with me?"

VI.

A FAREWELL ball was to close the countess's receptions, and of course Lucie was to be present. A few minutes before starting Léonce went to his wife's room where she was waiting for him.

"Why, here are some jewels I did not know you possessed," he remarked, touching a necklace which was half hidden by the opera cloak.

"Is it not lovely?"

"One could swear those were real diamonds."

"Yes, almost. I thought them so beautifully imitated that I could not resist buying them—5000 francs! Only fancy! Ah! it took all my new year's savings! Are you angry?"

"Well, I don't like to see you wearing false diamonds. I would rather you left that kind of thing to people of a certain class."

"But it is a thing very commonly done in our set. A lot of women wear false diamonds for fear of losing their real ones. And then Marthe's necklace was always before my eyes."

"Coquette!"

"I belong to my sex!" she replied, bending her head in affected humility.

Summer separated the two families, and on the return of Lucie and her husband to Paris George also came back to the capital; but Marthe was in Italy, where her husband had a great many friends.

One day George, Léonce, and Lucie, all three, had gone for a country walk, and Léonce, for a joke, tried to drag his wife down the rapid slope of a hill, when suddenly she stopped, and languidly leaning against her husband's shoulder:

"Take care, dear," she said, "do not make me walk so fast." Then she whispered a word in his ear, and from that day forth nearly all their talk was about the little child they now expected; the care to be taken of it, the way it would be brought up, its future, and so on. Léonce wished his wife to take every possible precaution for the safety of the treasure she was bearing. His kindness and love to her were doubly great, and the whole time now was one long, delicious intoxication, full of sweetest hopes.

Still, despite this devoted care, Lucie's health soon gave her husband cause for serious alarm. His fears, indeed, were but too well justified. With the first cry of the newly-born babe its mother drew her last breath. Nothing could describe the husband's grief. For some weeks he was quite mad, and his life was despaired of. To get him out of this state the doctor contrived to interest him in his paternal duties. He advised his relatives, who had hastened to Paris, to leave him alone with the child. It then fell to Léonce's

lot to attend to all those small cares for which he had been used to rely on others.

The nurse, to whom previous instructions had been given, consulted with him on everything, and as a result of the incessant supervision thus cleverly forced upon him, his heart awoke from its painful torpor.

His son! For months past he had thought and dreamt of this baby that was to be born; he had in imagination seen it trying to walk for the first time; he had seen it a child and a grown man, and then a catastrophe and a terrible darkness had suddenly shut out those dreams, and he had almost cursed the innocent cause of his grief. But when he saw the tiny creature surrender itself to him; when his fatherly affection awoke amid the agony of death, near the cradle of this child, who held out its arms to him as if he had power to stop its suffering, then he began to love it passionately, and with all the strength of the regret he felt for the wife who had gone. It was a touching sight to watch him carry the little sufferer about. What efforts to lift this little burthen! How sublimely awkward he was in placing the little boy properly in the bed-clothes! With his head leaning against the cradle he would often sit there lost in thought, watching the uncertain movements of the small pink hands busy with their toys.

A year passed in this way, and then Léonce was obliged to attend to work; moreover, his long-expected appointment in his native town had at last been granted to him.

He foresaw that his stay there would be protracted, as the work that was to be carried out there would require several years' supervision. He therefore determined to get rid of his Paris furniture.

In the midst of all these cares a crowd of things that had been confusedly hidden away during the first few months of his misfortune came before his eyes. It was a most painful trial. Some of the clothes still retained, as it were, the shape of the dear lost one; others were impregnated with the scents she had used. It seemed as if a part of herself had come to life again, and all Léonce's aching memories were acutely aroused.

He had at last summoned up courage to open the little desk in which Lucie had been wont to keep her papers. A half-written letter, some unfinished accounts—everything showed life suddenly broken off. His sad task was many times interrupted by his tears. With some small trinkets that he put on one side to get rid of he placed the necklace of false diamonds which his wife had worn but once, and which was neither very interesting as a souvenir nor worth much. The next day, taking a cab, he called at the jeweller's named by Lucie as having sold her the ornament, and asked him to take it back at a certain loss. A smile broke over the shopkeeper's face as he gave the necklace back to Léonce.

"Really, sir, I should do a splendid stroke of business," he said, "if, availing myself of your mistake, I accepted your proposal."

"How so?"

"These diamonds are real and of the finest water."

"A most perfect imitation, I believe."

"No, sir, no! the necklace is at least worth twenty-eight or thirty thousand francs."

"Impossible!"

"Well, ask Messrs. Turner & Humbolt themselves. See, this is their mark, they mounted this necklace, and you will find them confirm what I say."

"Your word is sufficient, sir," said Léonce, and he went away apparently quite calm.

"Rue de la Paix," said he to his cabman, giving him the address of the celebrated lapidists just mentioned.

"This necklace was mounted by your firm, sir?" he asked of one of the partners, who at once answered:

"Yes, sir, it was."

"Could you give me the date of the day it was bought? The person it belonged to is dead, and this information might perhaps be useful to her heirs."

"The sale of a necklace of this value isn't common enough to make the finding of the date difficult. Baron George de Valrens bought this necklace last March, I think, for the sum of thirty thousand francs. Yes, indeed, here is the proof of my statement," added the lapidist, who had been turning over the leaves of his salo-book.

"Many thanks."

Calm and very pale, Léonce bowed without adding another word. As he got into his cab again his heart was beating violently.

When he reached home the unhappy man rushed to the little desk, over which, only a few hours ago, he had shed so many bitter tears. He suddenly remembered a strange circumstance. On the day before her death Lucie, who had a presentiment of her approaching end, had sent him out of the way under an odd pretext. Having returned sooner than she expected him, he had detected a strong smell of burnt paper, of which he still saw the traces in the fireplace. He now remembered his wife's blush and her emotion when he innocently made a remark about it.

"Ah!" he cried, crunching under his feet the dear relics which he had so religiously put together that morning, "the wretch! the wretch!"

So this woman whom he had so loved and mourned had deliberately deceived him, each day acting an ignoble comedy. Hypocritical modesty! Maidenly blushes! All with her was a lie.

He pictured her again, with her unconscious grace, leaning on his arm in a ball room, and whispering in his ear that she only wished to be lovely for him—when another was expecting her!

But that man, thank God! he knew his name, that George, his so-called friend!

At that instant there was a knock at the door.

"Who is there?" called Léonce.

"Papa! Papa!" lisped a faint, uncertain voice.

"The child is not well," added the nurse. "I wish, sir, you would——"

His son! He had forgotten him—the treachery had, as yet, only crushed the husband. Now, however, the blow fell on the father.

This little creature whom he had loved, petted, watched over, and nursed in his arms, was, perhaps, not his own son after all. Then in a terrible rage, snatching the child from his nurse: "Leave me!" said he.

The trembling nurse obeyed.

"Oh! if you could but answer me!" cried Léonce, passionately, straining to his breast the fragile being whom that morning he had still called his son.

"He has blue eyes and light hair—like his mother—like George, too," he muttered.

"Papa! Papa!" said the child.

Léonce leant forward. But the kiss stopped half-way on his frozen lips.

"And it would always be so," he murmured in a husky voice. "This horrible doubt would pursue me every day with each look, with each caress."

Then he called in the nurse, and gave her the child.

It was a lovely June evening. Through the open windows came sweet-smelling breezes; a few steps away, in the shady paths of the Parc Monceau, young lovers walked, smiling to each other and looking forward to many long, bright years.

Léonce leant over the balcony and remained lost in deep thought. When he awoke from his meditation he went and opened the case in which he kept his revolver.

About midnight the noise of a report brought the anxious servants to his room. He was dead.

"Poor man! It was grief. He was so fond of his wife. Such a united couple!" whispered the servants round the corpse.

George de Valrens probably thought otherwise, when on waking he received the news of the suicide, with a green leather jewel-case bearing Lucie's monogram.

Baron George has now become a very serious-minded man. He sits in the Chamber of Deputies, and affectionately patronises a young man who strangely resembles him, young Max de Sudres, for whom the Countess Marthe on her side shows quite maternal care.

Has the necklace made any more victims? I am forced to fear it has, for I am assured this is not the first time that some such story as this one has been told.

A MODERN BORGIA.



It was at Naples. I shall not amuse myself by describing to you that city, where the soil palpitates amid the throbbing of the fiery crater; where everything is picturesque, the sky, the earth, and the inhabitants; where, on this hand, you see palaces, and on the other lazzaroni, living and sleeping in the sun.

The Neapolitan women are beautiful, their figures are supple, their eyes flash fire, and it is more difficult to keep yourself from loving them than it is to abandon yourself to their seductions.

George de Morels and his cousin Edouard had arrived at Naples a fortnight previously, and, as is the duty of strangers, they were, with the aid of guide-books, visiting the sights and monuments of the city. The *far niente*, which is habitual with the people of Southern Italy, had gained a little upon the two friends, and during the excessive heat they used to retire to their rooms to enjoy a *siesta* and a chapter of a congenial novel. One morning, after a most refreshing dewy night, George proposed to Edouard that they should go out for a ride. Neither of them knew the environs of Naples. They started on frisky horses amid the brilliant sunshine. In a joyous mood they went on and on, chatting and galloping gaily. Several miles along the road they discovered a lengthy avenue, at the end of which appeared a villa.

"Let's go down the avenue," said Edouard to George.

"All right," replied George, and they turned their horses under the spreading trees.

Two minutes later they alighted, a valet took their horses, and an old housekeeper invited them to enter the dining-room, where, as if they had been expected, the cloth was already laid. The two cousins took their seats, attributing their good fortune to some mistake.

"Ask somebody," whispered George to his companion, whereupon Edouard called, and the valet re-appeared.

"Do you expect company?" he asked.

"No, since your lordships have arrived."

"To whom does the villa belong?"

"To the Signora Lucrezia the beautiful."

"Can we present our compliments to your mistress?"

"Her wine is good, and her table amply served. Drink, eat, my

lords ; do not ask questions but wait. The rest will come in time." With these words the valet made a low bow and retired.

The ride had sharpened the appetites of the two young men, and they did justice to the hospitality of the invisible Lucrezia ; the wine got into their heads and they imagined any number of things about the beautiful unknown, each more or less improbable.

"She has grown old and lost her teeth or her hair, I expect," whispered George in Edouard's ear, between two glasses of wine.

"She is shutting herself up with some Renaud," suggested Edouard.

"Perhaps she is an Ariadne abandoned."

"No, a guilty wife hiding her shame."

"At all events we must see the thing out."

"No, the wisest course would be to remount our horses and to return to Naples."

"Well, as we have been told to wait, let us wait."

When their repast was over coffee and liqueurs were served, and they were invited to pass into the smoking-room, and thence into the billiard-room, the windows of which overlooked a park.

Scarcely had they entered this latter room when some delicious music arose from the shrubbery ; they went out, and just then a sweet female voice was blended with the sound of the instrument.

"It is the lady of the villa," said Edouard.

"The angels do not give sweeter concerts," replied George.

While listening they peered about ; then, as the singing ceased, a rustling, as it were of silk, was heard, a light foot stepped across the lawn, and for an instant a form became visible amid the trees ; it was she, Lucrezia, still more beautiful than she was said to be.

"Shall we not see her again ?" murmured George.

"Patience !" replied Edouard.

And springing forward each took a different path. But the fair unknown fled swiftly through the mazy paths, and they soon lost trace of her. An hour passed ; the lost friends called to each other, their voices came closer, and they returned to their starting-point.

"Did you see her ?" asked Edouard.

"Yes, she smiled at me. She is an angel !"

"No, no, we ought to fly from her dangerous glances."

"Perhaps you are right ; but she told us to wait."

"Look yonder, what do you see coming ?"

"Our horses."

"It is our dismissal."

"So much the worse ; I thought that we were only at the first chapter of a romance of chivalry, of which I was the hero."

"And Lucrezia the heroine ?"

"It was a sweet dream."

"It was my dream, too ; but like you I must bring it to an end."

Their horses were there, so they mounted, and soon the villa and the avenue disappeared behind them.

"Do you know, cousin, what has happened to me?" said George.
 "The valet slipped a note from her into my hand as we left."

"And she's written to me too."

"To give you an appointment?"

"Yes, to give me an appointment."

"Mine is for to-morrow, at ten o'clock in the evening."

"Mine is for the day after to-morrow, at the same hour."

"Is she a courtesan?"

"Who knows? We ought to avoid this mysterious woman."

"You don't mean to go, then?"

"Who would prevent me doing so?"

"I would!"

"What madness!"

"It would be madness to accept her love."

A spell of silence followed, and the horses went so rapidly that in less than an hour's time the two friends were back in Naples.

"I shall not lose sight of you," said Edouard to his cousin.

"But if I promise you not to return to the Villa Lucrezia?"

"Not even if you promise."

"I shall escape you, then."

"I defy you to do that."

"We shall see."

The rest of the day the two friends might have been seen together. In the evening, at about nine o'clock, they went to the theatre. George, very agitated, attempted to go out; but his friend retained him. By brusqueness he would have irritated him; however, by affectionate advice he induced him to remain, and thus on the following day George was not at the appointed assignation.

Two days passed. Towards nine o'clock one morning, as they were taking their breakfast at the *Café Français*, a waiter gave George a note containing these simple words: "If you are a true knight, you will remember the Villa Lucrezia, and the tenth hour." George made a sign to the bearer of the note, implying: "I will go," and continued his repast without allowing his companion to perceive any symptoms of his emotion. But Edouard thought that he had recognised the valet of the Villa Lucrezia, disguised as a waiter. He did not question his friend, but watched him.

In order to deceive his cousin, George feigned a calmness which he did not feel. When evening came on, he had a horse saddled at some distance from the hotel, and, pretending indisposition, he returned home, in order to throw Edouard off the track.

His stratagem succeeded, as he had foreseen it would; but twenty minutes later, Edouard, after knocking in vain at his friend's door, had it broken open, and then, not finding him in the room, he started in pursuit of him, taking the route of the Villa Lucrezia.

George, who arrived first, alighted. While he was seeking for a bell or a knocker at the gate of the villa, the valet who had given him the note in the morning appeared.

"This way, signor, my mistress is waiting for you."

"Is she a fairy, a woman, a demon, or an angel, your mistress?"

"She is what she is; leave your horse in my care, you will find it again here. The signora is coming to meet you."

George entered the courtyard. Lucrezia was waiting for him there, and made signs to him to follow her, but without uttering a word. They traversed a long corridor in which there were several doors. The young woman opened one of these, and motioned George to enter a room. The moon lighted up this room with its pale rays. Everything in it had a strange air of mystery.

"Chevalier," said Lucrezia, after closing the door, "do you not find my conduct strange?"

"If you love me, I shall esteem myself the happiest of men."

"You have been remarked, you are loved, and it shall be proved to you." And then she kissed George on the brow.

"Oh! my queen! My life for your love!" he cried.

"Your life! If I asked it, would you give it to me?"

"Without hesitation."

"Would you deliver me from an enemy?"

"I would kill him!"

"But you would have no one to kill."

"Oh! I will not suffer a rival," he answered, falling at her feet.

She raised him up. "Listen," she said; "a man loved me—I loved that man——"

"Do you say that in order to throw me into despair?"

"There is no question of you in this, but of a villain who betrayed me, and on whom I have revenged myself."

"What do you mean?"

"That I have killed my lover."

"Forget him, and let my love efface his very souvenir."

"I must first have a pledge of your obedience."

"Speak!"

"My father is severe on the point of honour. He went away three months ago, and left me to take care of myself. In his absence I received my seducer; he deceived me; I have punished him."

Then, drawing aside a curtain, Lucrezia took a taper and threw a light on a corpse lying in the bed, adding: "Do you understand?"

"You wish——"

"To see you take that corpse away; for my father will arrive to-morrow, and, if he suspects the truth, he will kill me."

George remained silent; and then Lucrezia resumed:

"Do you hesitate? After all, what does it matter to you if I die; you hardly know me, you cannot believe in my love, it is fatal!"

She turned upon him the fire of her eyes, and then he cried aloud: "Order, command me, Lucrezia, I am yours."

"Take, then, this body on the back of your horse, go as far as

the first precipice on the road ; there, on the brink of the abyss. you can leave it—the rest belongs to God !”

George would have defied half a dozen men ; but the sight of a corpse and the idea of touching it deadened his energy.

“ You falter ?” added Lucrezia. “ A glass of my cordial will set you right. I will drink with you. Now ! to your health.”

Their glasses clinked ; then she helped George to place the corpse on his horse, and dismissed him with these words :

“ In an hour, here, I shall expect you.”

The horse was stamping impatiently ; George mounted, and holding this lifeless body before him, he started on the road to Naples. His steed dashed onward, made restive by the legs of the corpse which were dangling against his sides.

Suddenly a horseman galloped up and stopped short in front of George, exclaiming : “ Is it you ?”

“ Yes, Edouard, it is I—the most imprudent and unhappy of men. Look at my burden.”

“ A corpse ?”

“ Which I am going to throw to the crows !”

“ What ? Lucrezia ?”

“ She is waiting for me. This man was her lover ; she killed him for his infidelity. You see this ravine ? That is his bier : people will think that he fell in.”

“ You shall not do that, George ! We will take the body to Naples, put it into the hands of the police, and denounce Lucrezia.”

“ A dead man in our hands ? We should be accused ourselves. Here is the chasm, and here I leave my burden.”

The mutilated body rolled down to the bottom of the abyss.

George now tried to turn his horse, and repeated to Edouard :

“ She told me to return in an hour's time. She is waiting.”

But suddenly Edouard saw him turn pale, stagger, and then fall.

“ Friend,” murmured George, “ it is in the dwelling-place of the shades that Lucrezia is waiting for me—before an hour has passed we shall both of us die, she and I. I understand it all now—that cordial was poison.”

“ No, George ; no, my friend, my brother, you will live, you will live,” pleaded Edouard.

But George died, and, indeed, on the following day the newspapers announced the death of Lucrezia. Her death was attributed to the jealous vengeance of a Frenchman.

Edouard at once left Naples ; later on, perhaps, he might have been taken for the guilty one.

E. NIBOYET.

THE END.

